Hustling narratives: Navigational capacities of first-generation, low-income African students

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Millicent Adjei

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While completing this work, I once lost a lot of information on one of my final drafts when my computer decided to reboot on its own. The incident left me devastated and confused. My 14-year-old, who was my study partner because she was also preparing for her high stakes secondary school entrance exams, sensed what had happened and my frustration. She got up from her seat, drew closer to me and gave me a big hug and asked: mummy, what can I do to help? Should I call daddy? Should I make you a cup of tea? Do you want to use my laptop? And many questions. I was immensely moved by her compassion and love I quickly wiped away the tears from my eyes and got right back to rewriting that draft all over again. My 11-year-old daughter, on the other hand, always asked me when I was finishing my "book" so she could spend more time with me. Both girls would always remind me of a draft that was due for submission and would always check in with me to see the progress of my dissertation. As children, I know they were just yearning for more time with their mother, but these experiences and moments were some of the highlights of this project, which pushed me to get it done. Janelle and Joycelyn I am grateful that you gave me this support and push.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my dear husband Mr. Emmanuel Yaovi Togo for walking by me to lead this family project, for being daddy and mummy to our two daughters for all the years I had to be away in school or for work and for helping me to give them the best example of what a woman can achieve in a culture that sometimes limits the potential of females. It is your love and support for all of us your 'girls' which has resulted in the successful completion of this project. Thank you.

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Abstract

The last two decades has seen growing interest in getting more academically promising First-Generation, Low-Income Students (FGLISs) into postsecondary education through various interventions to improve their social and economic mobility (Avery, 2013; Brennan & Shah, 2003; Engberg & Allen, 2011; Hoxby & Turner, 2013; Morley, Leach & Lugg, 2008; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, Thomas, & Li, 2008). This interest stems from multiple types of research indicating that individuals with postsecondary degrees have better life chances. Postsecondary degree holders also have a higher income earning potential, exhibit higher levels of civic engagement, are healthier, contribute more to the economic development of their country, and have more significant potential for socio-economic mobility than persons without such degrees (Avery, Howell, & Page, 2014; Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Carnevale, Rose, Cheah, 2011; Hout, 2011; Jacobson & Mokher, 2009; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie & Gonyea, 2008; Thayer, 2000).

The fourth Sustainable Goal on providing inclusive quality education, for instance, emphasizes on amongst other targets providing "equal access to affordable vocational training, to eliminate gender and wealth disparities, and achieve universal access to a quality higher education." Thus, making postsecondary education, especially for the world's disadvantaged an integral component of the world's sustainable development goals (UNDP, 2019). Consequently, postsecondary enrollment across the world is increasing steadily globally. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa, enrollment in secondary and tertiary education grew by more than 60% between 2000 and 2008 (UNESCO 2011).

We seem to be making good strides globally for some of the world's vulnerable populations to gain access to good quality higher education. However, research on the subjective experiences of these populations and the intersectionality of their identities and its impact on how they navigate through their postsecondary training to succeed is limited especially for students living in

developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa. (Morley, Leach & Lugg, 2008). This lack of research on how vulnerable youths are experiencing postsecondary education cannot be ignored because they form the highest population group globally. The 2015 United Nations' World Population Prospects report, for example, predicts that the population of Africa will double by the year 2050 with the highest population being the youth (UN. 2015). Côté (2014) has argued for instance for more research on global youth from the global South to avoid the continues application of theories and analytical frameworks from similar youths in the global North being used to understand their experiences in the absence of contextually empirical research done in the global south.

Nonetheless, in spite of this dearth in research on the educational experiences particularly of vulnerable youths in the global South, there seems to be some evidence that some FGLISs are using a cultural nuanced and positive assert-based navigational capacity "hustling" as an academic resilience and persistence strategy. This strategy is learned from their experiences of being disadvantaged to navigate the higher education context to succeed once they gain access to counter the often deficit narratives used to explain their college attainment.

The capacity to "hustle" (inspired by the work of Arjun Appadurai and Theime, 2017), in the higher educational setting, is not extensively researched and therefore does not have a strong literature base. I employ a narrative inquiry study to understand young people's capacity to "hustle" which seems to be characterized by the application of multiple survival and persistence strategies including: contingency planning, collective agency, accumulation and use of various forms of capital, self-efficacy and self-authorship when conditions for success or survival is uncertain and challenging.

This empirical study analyses narratives from 17 students in an African University and demonstrates how performing hustling is critical to youths' capacity to navigate their educational

futures to become undergraduates to afford them the benefits of postsecondary education. I draw on youth-centered methodology – narrative inquiry using life-story, which is familiar to the African system of knowledge sharing through storytelling familiar to the youth. Narrative inquiry gives youth a voice to share their most valuable experiences with hustling to show the complexity of youths' experiences in negotiating their education alongside the uncertainties and challenges in their lives as they actively pursued their aspirations of a better life.

This success strategy is worth investigating because, even though the cost of college attendance is covered for the participants in this study with the hope of removing the conditions causing them to struggle through college, they still maintain they "hustled" their way through university and further attribute their undergraduate success to their ability to hustle. This study answered the question: How do first-generation low-income students conceptualize, perform, and used their capacity to hustle to attain success in an African University?

The results of this study points to five key findings that; i)FGLISs use hustling as a pathway to meeting multiple aspirations which can be personal, family oriented or communal, ii) Hustling is a form of collective agency used by FGLISs to attain success; iii) Hustling is an accumulation of multiple forms of capital acquired and used by FGLISs throughout their educational and wider life trajectory; iv) Hustling enables FGLISs to develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy which they fall on when things gets tough as they work towards their educational, aspirational and v) Hustling is a form of catalyst which facilitates self-authorship of FGLISs. These key elements of hustling explain its propensity to contribute to the success of the participants in this study.

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Chapter One: Introduction

WAWA ABA - Seed of the wawa tree

Symbol of hardiness, toughness, and perseverance. The seed of the Wawa tree is extremely hard. In Akan culture, it is a symbol of someone who strong and tough. It inspires the individual to persevere through hardships.

Ladies and gentlemen, my being here today prove that we are not the product of our circumstances but rather the product of our aspirations; we do not dwell on what we have been through; our struggle, the inequalities in our societies, the poverty, or our broken environments. We are a group that carries the ambitions of scientists, engineers, business leaders, artists, teachers, entrepreneurs, and many others.
(George, Validatory Speech, June 2016)

How do some first-generation low-income students (FGLISs) gain mastery of the academic milieu using knowledge and skills gained from their life experiences, collective agency, and capitals accumulated from their cultural communities to succeed in college despite the many precarious conditions they confront? In June 2016, I attended a commencement ceremony in Ghana, West Africa, at which the valedictorian was a first-generation[1] international student. Through the generosity of a very comprehensive scholarship program, he gained admission to the University and graduated with an undergraduate degree in Management Information Systems. After a very emotional and inspiring recount of their collective journey over the four years, highlighting some of their highs and lows and some of their outstanding achievements as a class, he concluded with his personal life story in the narrative below:

[1] First- generation students are college students whose parents do not have college degrees and are the first in their families to go to college (Engle & Tinto, 2008)

As I conclude, please permit me to share with you the simple story of an African child as my last words to you. On the 13th of December 2002, he lost a parent; the breadwinner, father, and sustainer of his family of six. He was a ten-year-old at the time, and the first male child living in a society, where he was expected to assume the responsibilities of his father. However, as he struggled to make his life great, things began to deteriorate in his single parent home. Dust kissed his feet, his hands bruised from the day's toils and his face smeared with sweat.

Nevertheless, optimism kept him going. He walked the streets with no shoes; he struggled to find a vest for his worn-out chest as he went through his days with a mind as blank as his mama's savings account. Somehow, he kept a dream alive within him, and he made it through primary and secondary education, with a hunger for university education. He kept hope alive as he engaged his mind with teaching, till one day he heard a knock on his door; offering him a life-changing opportunity at no cost, on an international scholarship to attend college. He put faith to work and like a miracle, he found himself a new home, a new family, and a new purpose. At college, he saw the world from a different perspective. That ten-year-old boy has now been empowered to be a leader and is today delivering the valedictory speech on behalf of his classmates, who have equally profound stories.

Ladies and gentlemen, my being here today prove that we are not the product of our circumstances but rather the product of our aspirations; we do not dwell on what we have been through; our struggle, the inequalities in our society, poverty, or our broken environments. We are a group that carries the ambitions of scientists, engineers, business leaders, artists, teachers, entrepreneurs, and many others.

> To everyone here today, the Class of 2016's message to you is this; do not let your history determine your glory; because the past is an experience, the present is an experiment, and the future is full of expectation. Use your experience wisely, experiment, and with the right choices, you can achieve your expectations. Congratulations Class of 2016. God, bless you. I love you all. (George, Validatory Speech, June 2016)

At the end of his speech, everyone was standing with rousing applause; I remained seated and humbled. I had seen him grow and mature, sometimes frightened by his experiences and what life and the systems and structures he functioned in threw at him. I felt humbled that I was privileged to be part of his journey because he generously shared it with me. I began to ask questions about how he was able to pull through amidst the multiple barriers and challenges he spoke about in his speech and later shared with me. It also struck me that while George[2] got the endorsement of his classmates to own that envious stage which he efficiently used to tell his unique story, 48.6 %[3] of the graduating class according to the University's demographics were also students from various disadvantaged backgrounds and had gained access through different forms of scholarships like George. They had similar stories which the world will never get to hear about. Stories of aspirations, dreams, opportunities, family, expectations, agency, faith, community, choices, experiences, experimentation, hope and persistence remain untold in scholarly

[2] George is a pseudonym to conceal the identity of the student. All participants in this study chose their own pseudonyms.

[3] According to the university's Office of External Relations 21.5% of the graduating class were on full scholarships which covered the entire cost of their college attendance (Tuition, room and board, meal plan, laptops, stationary and a monthly stipend. 27.1% of the graduating class received partial scholarship which included some combination of financial support but not as comprehensive as students on full scholarship. Scholarships were determined by the both need and merit (Personal communication from the Universities external relations office which manages the data on financial aid).

communities because limited research exists on the motivations, biases, educational trajectories, and experiences of First-generation low-income students in institutions of higher learning in developing countries (Morley, Leach & Lugg, 2008).

In the ensuing months, after their graduation, I engaged with George and several of his colleagues who graduated from the institution (with the support of various financial aid programs) about their experiences. One word kept coming up - they all claimed they "hustled" throughout their educational trajectories to succeed. So, I began to dig into what it meant to "hustle," which initiated this dissertation. The conceptualization of *hustle* by George and other African students is complex and cannot only be explained through a dictionary or Anglo-centric definitions. The concept of *hustle* is likely embedded in empowerment, contingency planning, uncertainties, colonialism, the spaces occupied by students in challenging economic environments, African cultural traditions, faith, self-authorship, and persistence. It is a term I have heard repeatedly, but one which lacks empirical understanding. To this end, I ask the question: *In what ways do first-generation low-income students (FGLISs) conceptualize and enact hustle as a strategy to attain their educational aspirations in an African higher educational institution?*

Often, FGLISs are perceived by some higher education studies and literature as a lacking the skills, ability to persist, academic preparedness leading to their low college attainment (Choy, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Thayer, 2000). Because of this evidence, FGLISs are expected to be less able to handle the academic rigor, engage effectively, and participate in the academy in the same ways as their peers from middle and high-income family backgrounds (Harper, 2010; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Additionally, FGLISs come to the academy with a unique set of skills, experiences and cultural dispositions which may not be familiar to the faculty, administrators, and peers of the academy because the academic milieu is structured around the norms, traditions, and

values of the dominant culture (see Bourdieu, 1977). The lack of recognition of the cultural and familial ways of FGLISs may lead to feelings of isolation, a negative sense of belonging and ultimately their attrition (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Rendon, 1994; Strayhorn, 2012). Furthermore, institutional actors may place significant emphasis on what FGLISs do not have. Such a focus delimits the strengths FGLISs have and what they could bring with them from their cultural communities and life experiences. Such strengths could be of benefit to FGLISs effectively navigating the college environment in an inclusive way (Rendon, 1994; Yosso, 2005).

Consequently, there is an increasing call for higher education scholars to explore strength-based research[4] to understand the experiences and persistence of FGLISs. This asset approach is essential in supporting and facilitating their college attainment beyond giving them access, mainly because of the rising low rate at which FGLISs are graduating from college, despite increased efforts to improve their access (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008).

In the sections that follow, I will locate the study broadly in the context of higher education and discuss the emerging call for a different approach to understanding FGLISs beyond the prevalent deficit-oriented research[5] in the current literature. The chapter will also review the problem statement, an overview of definitions of the terminologies used in the study, and an outline of the research questions guiding the study. It will then outline the research purpose, my initial framing of the conceptual framework grounding the study, the significance of the study, and a preview of the rest of the dissertation.

[4] Strength- based research focuses on the positive attributes of the experiences of marginalized and disadvantaged students which contribute to their educational success (Gorski, 2008; Harper, 2010, Rendon, 1994).

[5] Deficit research emphasizes what marginalized students do not have and the barriers they face,and interprets them as deficiencies instead of interrogating the structuring inequalities which might be contributing to the barriers (Gorski, 2008; Yosso, 2005).

Situating the Study in the Field of Higher Education

College degrees are increasingly becoming attractive because of multiple types of research indicating that individuals with college degrees have better life chances. College degree holders have a higher income earning potential, exhibit higher levels of civic engagement, are healthier, contribute more to the economic development of their country, and have more significant potential for socio-economic mobility than persons without such degrees (Avery, Howell, & Page, 2014; Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Carnevale, Rose, Cheah, 2011; Hout, 2011; Jacobson & Mokher, 2009; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie & Gonyea, 2008; Thayer, 2000). Consequently, college enrollment is increasing globally. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa, enrollment in secondary and tertiary education grew by more than 60% between 2000 and 2008 (UNESCO 2011).

However, despite the many benefits of higher education and the numerous efforts being made globally to increase higher education access, a variety of scholars have expressed concern about who is gaining access and whether access predicts attainment. Such concerns especially relate to FGLISs (Banya, & Elu, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Perna, 2015; World Bank, 2011). Higher education attainment remains heavily skewed towards those from privileged and affluent backgrounds (World Bank Report, 2011). Such skewing may have hidden influences on the norms, values, and experiences found among students and staff in universities. The concern for college access, persistence, and attainment for FGLISs has been an item on the agendas of national governments, international educational funding organizations, charitable groups, and academic institutions for the past two decades. Various initiatives have sought to improve access and widen the social composition of those in higher education. Such efforts primarily strive to ensure that more young people from the most deprived sectors of society gain entry (Avery, 2013; Brennan &

Shah, 2003; Engberg & Allen, 2011; Hoxby & Turner, 2013; Morley, Leach & Lugg, 2008; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, Thomas, & Li, 2008).

Nonetheless, although the financial ability is a significant barrier to college access for FGLISs, research has shown that access alone is not enough to guarantee their success and completion (Engstrom &Tinto, 2008). For instance, Kezar, Walpole, and Perna (2015) assert that even when the financial barrier to access is entirely removed for FGLISs, they may still face a lack of existing programs relevant to their experiences. Such experiential mismatches may cause an additional barrier to their engagement and eventual success. Yosso (2005) further emphasized that all students, including FGLISs, bring their unique cultural, social, and life experiences with them to the academy. However, even though these experiences have a significant impact on how they engage with the institution and their eventual success or failure, the experiences and non-traditional forms of capital that disadvantaged students bring with them to the academy are often not understood, acknowledged and accepted. According to Frereir (1993), Gilbert (2008), Hooks (1994), Kincheloe (2008) and Rendon (1994), for universities to be responsive to the needs of all students to ensure their success, diverse student experiences must be recognized by educators and included in the academic experience both in and out of the classroom.

Situating the Study in the Educational Context of Ghana

To understand the educational experiences of FGLISs from sub-Saharan Africa, it is essential to understand the various contexts that have shaped their experiences on their access, persistence, and attainment. The purpose of this background is not to generalize the context of higher education in a region as large and culturally diverse as sub-Saharan Africa, but to draw on research that informs some of the common challenges facing the educational stratifications that exists and disadvantages to the access, persistence, and attainment of FGLISs within the higher

education milieu in sub-Saharan Africa. In the sections that follow, I will discuss the focus of the review mentioned above and some of the current interventions being adopted to improve FGLISs access to higher education. I will also draw from studies highlighting International Scholarship Programs as a tool for enhancing access for FGLISs. Additionally, I will highlight the experiences of FGLISs in such programs. While this study looks at the educational trajectory of the participants from as far back as they could remember, I will focus the ensuing section on the access to higher education as college completion will be the final determinant of success for the participant in this study.

Government Policies and Socioeconomic Conditions on FGLISs Higher Educational Access

Several studies have focused on the challenges facing higher education systems in developing countries in Africa and other parts of the word. (Mohamedbhai, 2014; Oketch, 2003; Samoff, 1999; Teferra & Altbach, 2004). Many sub-Saharan African countries have experienced enormous pressure over the last two decades to increase access to and quality of tertiary[6] education (Samoff, 1999; Teferra & Altbach, 2004). This increase in demand can be attributed to several global policies like the Education for All (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals, which called for significant increases in the higher education pipeline of students from secondary education to postsecondary education (Mohamedbhai, 2014; Teferra & Altbach, 2004). This global trend is also present in Ghana (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013). While the demand for higher education in Africa has increased, higher educational institutions have experienced significant budget cuts from governments due to the concurrent demand and need to confront issues of poverty

[6] In most African countries, the term tertiary education is sometimes used interchangeably for higher education but encompasses broader postsecondary education beyond college degree attainment (Teferra & Altbach, 2004).

alongside support for other pressing demands on government like improvement of healthcare, and food security (Mohamedbhai, 2014; Oketch, 2003; Samoff, 1999).

To support government bottom lines, the government of Ghana turned to borrow from international funding organizations like the International Monitory Fund (IMF) to supplement its budgetary needs (Oketch, 2003). The dependency on institutions like the IMF to supplement government budget resulted in the imposition of debt servicing policies like the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), which came with several austerity measures further requiring governments to reduce spending on sectors like tertiary education (Buchmann & Hannum, 2001; Konadu-Agyemang, 2000). According to Reimers (1991), declines in government spending negatively impact teacher quality. In this case, teachers' salaries were consistently delayed, teacher motivation waned, and various strike actions by teachers significantly created a backlog of students who could enter the higher education system. Reimers further noted that SAPs had devastating effects on the educational structures in sub-Saharan Africa, including a significant decline in access to secondary and tertiary education. Students who suffered from this decline in college access included FGLISs who now could not afford the various fees introduced by governments.

Furthermore, the IMF required indebted recipient countries to decentralize and privatize their educational systems. These moves denied low-income families access to tertiary educational institutions due to the introduction of fees and other charges (Arnove, Franz& Morse, 1997). Furthermore, female students across many African countries experienced significant disparities in their access to higher education due to cultural and gender norms which do not support the education of female students especially when families are pressed to make a choice between which gender should go first (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah 2013; Mohamedbhai, 2014; Oketch, 2003; Teferra & Altbach, 2004).

The increasing demand for access and government inability to expand public tertiary education has had various consequences on the quality of education and the stratification between students from the various socioeconomic backgrounds (Mohamedbhai, 2014). Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah (2013), for instance, noted that in Ghana, access to higher education had not been broadened to include students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, women, and students from rural and peripheral communities. Many FGLISs tend to come from rural and peripheral communities with poorly resourced secondary schools which do not adequately support their academic preparation and competitiveness to gain admission into tertiary institutions (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah 2013).

For example, a study conducted by Addae-Mensah (2000) revealed that although there are over 600 secondary schools that submit applications to Ghana's universities, more than 75% of those who finally enrolled mainly consisted of students from only 50 schools. Additionally, these 50 schools were located in only five out of the ten regions in the country. These statistics indicate that parents are using multiple strategies to ensure that their children gain admission to those secondary schools to enhance the chances of their children gaining access to the university (Manuh, Gariba, & Budu, 2007). Manuh et al. (2007) noted that these scenarios further widened the gap between students from low economic backgrounds because they tend not to have the same family resources to enhance their admission to the 50 highly competitive schools because of its demand and cost of attendance. Furthermore, to respond to the increased higher education budget cuts, many tertiary educational institutions have adopted different strategies to make up for its budgetary needs. Prominent amongst them is the introduction of cost-sharing where students are now expected to pay some fees (Marcucci, Johnstone & Ngolovoi, 2008; Oketch, 2003), which has significantly affected students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Interventions to improve College Access for FGLISs in Ghana

To address the challenge of access to tertiary education, especially for students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, the government of Ghana— in collaboration with higher education institutions— has instituted several measures to increase access. One such measure is affirmative action, which employs a more relaxed admission requirement for students from rural areas, allocated admission quotas reserved for poorly endowed regions and schools, and the introduction of the student's loan and bursary schemes (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013; Effah, 2011).

Additionally, in Ghana and other sub-Saharan African countries, the introduction and growth of private universities over the past decade has helped to absorb the increased output from the secondary school level which grossly outnumbered the capacity of the public higher education sector (Effah, 2011; Banya & Elu, 2001; Ishengoma, 2004; Mohamedbhai, 2014; Oketch, 2003; Teferra & Altbach, 2004). However, the introduction and growth of private universities marginally reduced the demand on public institutions due to their capacity to admit only a few students and their cost of attendance being significantly higher than the public universities (Mohamedbhai, 2014).

Improving Access Through Scholarship Programs and Resulting Assumptions to Success

In addition to government and higher education institutionally-driven interventions programs to improve access, International Scholarship Programs (ISPs) are present across sub-Saharan Africa and are geared towards supporting the training of the human capital across the continent. These scholarships tend to target poor, economically disadvantaged, vulnerable, and underprivileged (but academically talented) students by providing significant financial resources to support their cost of attendance to college (Perna, et al., 2014; Volkman, Dassin, & Zurbuchen, 2009) with the intention that once they gain access, they would acquire the needed skills for achieving social and economic mobility as posited by human capital theory.

Human Capital Approach to Scholarship Support for Access

Human Capital Theory (HCT) asserts that individuals who invest in the acquisition of skills and knowledge through education increase their productivity at work and accrue economic returns, such as high salaries and upward economic mobility, when they use their skills in the job market (Becker, 1993; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004; Schultz, 1961). Schultz (1961) further argues that education increases an individual's chances for job mobility. HCT, in sum, is the capital individuals have through their investment in education to gain skills and training (Tan, 2014). HCT, therefore, assumes that the primary purpose of higher education is for economic returns hence, its measure is one's ability to invest and attain knowledge and skills through education. This assumption has considerably shaped the increased investment in higher education access of FGLISs because it is believed that once they have access, they will gain the needed employable skills and go on to obtain economic mobility, as demonstrated in *figure 1* below.

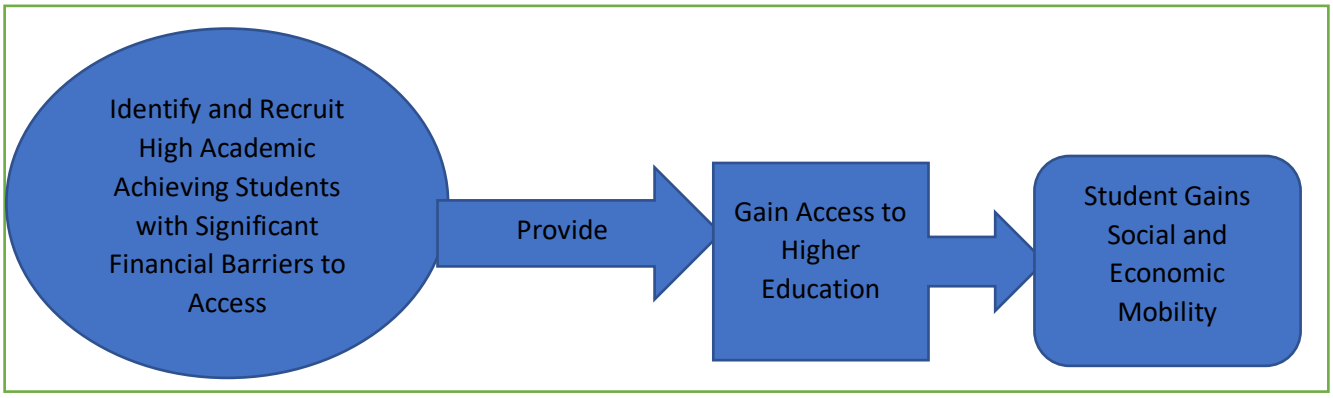


Figure 1: Human Capital Assumption of FGLISs Success through Scholarship Programs

Using a human capital approach depicts a direct route to success and relies on the abilities of the intellectual competency of the student and the financial support given through the scholarship alone to result in their success. This process or framework does not consider the

complex institutional, cultural, and context influences which I will highlight in the subsequent sections, especially in the criticisms of the various categorizations of FGLISs. I will especially demonstrate that the notion of cultural capital of FGLISs is highly structured around the cultural capital of their peers from high and middle-income families and often places FGLISs in a state of mismatch. The question, then, is what do FGLISs do when they find themselves in this state of mismatch? How do they negotiate their interdependent cultural norms with that of the independent values and norms of the academy? What skills and capitals in their present and past experiences do they draw on to navigate these complexities? What are some of the subtle and sometimes visible institutional roadblocks which cause them to *hustle* to succeed? I hope to explore potential answers to these questions through this study.

Does Access Result in Persistence and Attainment?

Although creative political and civil society initiatives have helped increase access to higher education for a broader range of students, several studies indicate that accessibility does not necessarily predict completion (Adelman, 1999; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Tinto, 1993). For example, findings from several studies on FGLISs suggest that institutions may lack a thorough understanding of the intersectionality of their identities, their unique cultural experiences, and the various forms of strengths they bring with them to the academe (Harper, 2010; Yosso, 2005). Such lack of understanding may deter meaningful engagement in academic programs and on campus (Engstrom &Tinto, 2008; Harper, 2010; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Rendon, 1994; Yosso, 2005).

Instead, a more common phenomenon can be framed through the lens of cultural reproduction (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) whereby in institutions, the dominant cultural group receives validation and acceptance and is reproduced as the guiding norms used in the everyday interactions and engagements of the academic community. Thus, higher education faculty and

administrators defer to using the cultural codes and norm of the majority student population who, in the U.S., are usually white and affluent students from college-going backgrounds. In many African countries, cultural norms tend to be dominated by students from wealthy backgrounds. In this case, more males than females and more students from the cities, as opposed to those from rural communities, attend universities (Atuahene, & Owusu-Ansah, 2013; Hyde, 1993; Teferra, & Altbach, 2004), creating university cultures that are dominated by urban male elites. In such cases, the experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds and non-dominant cultural groups are either neglected or labeled as having deficits (Dudley -Marling, 2007; Gorski, 2008; Valencia, 1997; Yosso, 2005). While this perception of 'students with deficits' has dominated the current higher education literature, there are students like George and his colleagues who are first-generation and from a low socio-economic background who are succeeding in college.

Relatedly, and in agreement with Cote (2014), even though a significant percentage of the world's youth population is located in Africa, Latin America and some developing countries in Asia, many of the current research on youth studies are based in the Global North. Consequently, the few researches which focuses on the lives and experiences of young people in the Global South are heavily influenced by theories and frameworks developed from the outcomes of research work on the experiences of their peers in the Global North, which may not reflect the diversity, contextual nuances and cultural relevance of the Global South (Morris & Adjei, 2019 forthcoming book chapter).

In general, there is a gap in the literature about the situation of FGLISs in sub-Saharan African (SSA) higher educational institutions— especially FGLISs who gain access to higher education through scholarships like George. However, there may be some overlap in experiences between FGLISs from SSA and those faced by FGLISs in the Global North. These challenges are

characterized by perceptions that students lack economic, cultural, and social capital and possess deficits in academic preparedness (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Choy, 2001; Choy & Bobbitt, 2000; Coleman, 1966; Ellwood & Kane, 2000; Forsyth & Furlong, 2000; Frempong, Ma & Mensah, 2012; Frenette, 2007; Gandara, 1995; Gladieux & Swail, 1999; Kane, 1994; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Terenzini et al., 1996). Admittedly, the contributions of the research done on youth populations who are first-generation and low-income students in the Global North can help inform the general characteristics of this population. Nonetheless, there is a need to examine the diversity, especially regional diversity, which constitutes much of this population to shape policies and better engage and support this population to attain their educational goals. Therefore, there is a need for more research to fill this dearth in the literature, specifically to understand culturally relevant and familial theories and frameworks from the experiences of youth from the Global South.

To this end, I seek to understand the concept of *hustle*, a culturally nuanced navigational capacity used by youths in conditions of uncertainty, precarity and survivalism mainly in the informal employment sector to get by (Theime, 2017). Hustle is now being applied in the formal academic context by some FGLISs to achieve their academic goals. I explore how youth are conceptualizing *hustle* in the academic setting by broadly asking *how are some FGLISs applying the capacity to hustle throughout their educational trajectories to attain success?* Through the stories of successful FGLISs, I seek to understand how the ability to *hustle* is *conceptualized*, how it is *enacted,* and how it *contributed* to their eventual educational success. These students have experienced and navigated multiple precarious conditions in a higher educational institution in an affluent African institution with cultural practices like what may be found in a U.S. elite college,

This study reinforces studies that challenge research that frame students as possessing deficits because of what they lack (see Dudley-Marling, 2007; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Yosso,

2005) and further seeks a deeper understanding of how students enact their own success through their capacity to *hustle*. Students informally use the term and lifestyle of *hustle* to describe how they navigate their experience as FGLISs in an elite college. In informal conversations, students typically refer to how they use community cultural wealth and develop self-authorship through strategic choices and notions of meeting their college expectations. Although students have not used academic terms such as community cultural wealth and self-authorship, George's speech indicated that engaging *hustle* is a conscious choice. George implored students to "Use your experience wisely, experiment, and with the right choices, you can achieve your expectations." Similarly, this qualitative study deploys a narrative inquiry methodology using extensive life-histories interviews to gain a deeper understanding of how FGLISs construct *hustle* in the academy through their experiences shared in their stories.

In undertaking this study, I acknowledge that FGLISs face multiple precarious conditions in their educational pursuits; however, this study seeks to provide a detailed and nuanced account of how FGLISs draw upon their understanding and enactment of *hustle*, a form of agency, to help them navigate and address the social, cultural, systemic and academic structures that further hinder their success. I have informally observed that one's upbringing and cultural background uniquely inform these processes and have not, until now, been addressed in higher education literature. Because of the lack of previous research on this subject, I seek to develop an in-depth understanding and detailed account of the concept of the capacity to *hustle* as the process through which FGLISs, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, enact community cultural wealth and self-author their college experiences. Most importantly, this study aims to highlight the possibilities of other asset-based frameworks to help our understanding of how FGLISs use *hustle* as a navigational capacity to achieve their educational aspirations.

Statement of Study Purpose and Study Questions

This qualitative narrative inquiry has three objectives: 1) To understand how FGLISs understand and construct *hustle* as part of as a navigational capacity to achieve their educational goals; 2) To know how they perform *hustle* throughout their life experiences especially in relation to attaining their educational goals, and 3) To understand the nexus between their capacity to *hustle* and their educational success. Ultimately, the study aims to answer the over-arching question: *In what ways do first-generation low-income students conceptualize and use their capacity to hustle throughout their educational experiences to achieve success in an African University?*

To answer this overarching question, this study employed a narrative inquiry approach, to give voice to the nuanced and unique experiences of 17 FGLISs, drawing from their lived experiences by asking the following research questions:

1) What does *hustle* mean to first-generation low-income students who have led a life filled with various forms of adversities but who have gained access to an African university through their capacity to *hustle*?

2) What are the lived experiences of the participants' performance of *hustle* throughout their educational trajectories from as far back as they could remember as they reflect upon in their senior year of college?

3) In what ways do the participants articulate their college success and how do they associate their college success to their capacity to *hustle*?

Conceptual Frameworks Informing this Study

Studies of how FGLISs succeed in higher education are limited. Many studies focus instead on why they fail. Additionally, there is limited literature available on the unique experiences of FGLISs from other geographical regions outside the Global North particularly in Africa, Latin America and some developing countries in Asia where the majority of the world's youth

population are located (Cote, 2014). Despite this lack of literature, my experience indicates that FGLISs from this region are engaged in a process they call *hustling*, a capacity they have learned from their previous experiences navigating through the daily uncertainties and adversities to attain their educational goals. According to conversations I have had with some scholarship students, they have used *hustle* to navigate their educational trajectories leading to them doing the same in the higher education context.

The concept of capacity to *hustle* in the academic context does not have strong literature support although Thieme (2017)has researched hustle in the informal youth unemployment sector amongst youth who live in adversity in the streets of Nairobi, Kenya (Thieme, 2017). In the informal sector, Thieme associated hustle with "the everyday dealings associated with uncertainty and accepted informalities that pervade realms of everyday life amongst youth in precarious urbun geographies" (p. 529). In the formal setting, however, no theoretical framework for analyzing *hustle* currently exists but evidence from the stories of the participants in this study points to multiple vital concepts which include aspiration (Strayhorn, 2016), Mahmood's (2011) theory of collective agency and accumulation of numerous capitals, which I situate in Yosso's (2015) Community Cultural Wealth framework. Additionally, evidence from the participants' stories situates *hustle* in Bandura's (1977) theory of Self-efficacy, Baxter Magolda's (2004) Self-Authorship theory, and Aspiration. I drew on these concepts and scholars to analyze the experiences of *hustle* as performed by the 17 participants in this study.

At the heart of *hustle* is one's aspiration to reach a goal; in this case, the educational goals set by the participants in this study. While the concept of Aspiration has been well researched and hold multiple meanings, I use Strayhorn's (2016) dictionary definition of aspiration "as a strong aim, desire, or ambition- a goal that may be hoped for, even in the face of evidence that suggests

it may be beyond one's ability or expectation" (p. 133). In Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model, she outlines six different conceptualizations of capital which individuals from marginalized backgrounds gain from their cultural communities. Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) differs from traditional conceptualizations of capital because CCW is communal in nature and embodies a collective aspiration and system of support towards success, which embraces the concept of collective agency. Relatedly, the informative framework for the understanding of *hustle* Self-efficacy theory outlines four significant ways in which individuals gain the conviction that they have control over reaching their goals through the four elements of performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. I focus on the first three elements, which participants overwhelmingly exhibited throughout their stories to demonstrate how they built their self-efficacy.

Finally, I apply Baxter Magolda's (2004) Self-Authorship theory. In this theory, individuals (with their embodied dispositions and wealth) encounter a contextual world characterized by uncertainty and unfamiliarity which forces them to engage within their current context using their constructions of what constitutes knowledge, their relationship with others and their understanding of one's sense of self. These frameworks will be explored in Chapter 2 and are lenses through which my study will be conducted to provide a broader understanding to *hustle* a concept that is present, but not empirically understood in higher education literature.

Significance of the Study

When youth from low-income families persist amidst several economic, social, and marginalizing cultural factors, they have great potential to acquire the needed skills to improve upon their chances in life. There is the need to support them in ways they are familiar with. Doing so would enable their continued persistence and success (Arzy et al., 2006; Colyer, 2011; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Gilbert, 2008; Rendon, 1994). I intend that this study will contribute to and broaden

the literature on college persistence and attainment of FGLISs by empirically providing a deeper asset-based understanding of FGLISs educational success through the operationalization of the capacity to hustle as a navigational capacity used by some FGLISs to succeed. In so doing, the study will provide a counter-narrative to the multiple deficit literature, which characterizes their educational experiences.

I intend to also fill the dearth in the literature on the educational pathways of FGLISs from SSA. According to a 2015 UN report on world population, the population of Africa is predicted to double in the year 2050 with the majority of this population being the youth. While this boom in the population can accrue significant benefits to many developing countries in Africa particularly concerning its workforce, it can also be very disastrous if this workforce is not adequately supported to gain the needed academic training to drive the economic and social productivity of these countries. Central to this academic training is the need to use familial frameworks, theories, and concepts to these populations to understand their educational experiences to support them in ways that align with their cultural, social, religious and contextual relevance. In this respect, I hope that this study will contribute to the development of such familial theories and frameworks in understanding this diverse youth group within the African youth population.

Finally, the methodology used in this study narrative inquiry together with life stories interviews harnesses on the storytelling traditions of SSA which gives voice to the participants to share their educational experiences in ways that are meaningful to them. While there has been a multitude of research work focusing on FGLISs, a few of these research focuses on the life-histories of this population of students which lead to the potential of them broadly being defined and researched as a homogenous group. FGLISs, however, are diverse and nuanced. Through the individual narratives of the participants in this study, I seek to shed more light on some of the

nuanced experiences amongst this population of students and how they experience *hustle.* I hope that this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the deep diversity that exists within the FGLISs population through their voices and stories. In the section that follows, I offer definitions to some of the terms used in this study.

Terms used in this Study

The following paragraphs are definitions of terminologies used in this study. These definitions apply specifically to the context of this study. It is not meant to be an exhaustive discussion but a guide to enhance readers' understanding of how each term applies to the context of the study.

Low-Income Students

Although a low-income background is often used in defining low-income students, low-income backgrounds look very different within the diverse cultural contexts in the world. For example, Choy & Bobbitt (2000) define low-income students in the U.S. as "those whose family income falls below 125 percent of the federally established poverty level for their family size" (p. 2). Engle and Tinto (2008), on the other hand, define low-income status in the U.S. as "having an annual household income under $25,000" (p. 8).

Such precise definitions are difficult to measure in many sub-Saharan African countries probably because of the large informal financial systems and the multiple domestic strategies used by low-income families to get by, many of which are difficult to measure. However, there have been several attempts to describe LISs outside of the U.S. For example, Van Zyl (2016), Breier (2010), and Morley and Lussier (2009) describe contextualized economic disadvantage as a critical contributor to the classification of students as being low income. Also, these authors expanded socio-economic disadvantage to include students living in "extreme poverty" and many other

forms of disadvantages determined by gender, age, social support systems, ethnicity, geographic location in their country (rural or urban), harmful cultural practices, and religion among others (Banya & Elu, 2001; Effah, 2011; Mohamedbhai, 2014; Teferra & Altbach, 2004).

Also, many FLISs tend to be the first in their immediate families to go to college. Therefore, these students may not have available guidance and support of their parents or immediate kin to help them navigate the college system like their peers from college-going backgrounds, of what is termed traditional college goers (McDonough, 1997; Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella, 2012; Thayer, 2000). The LISs in this study are students who are the first in their families to go to college and, despite the multiple barriers they faced (economic, social, and systemic), have excelled academically. All the students have been awarded various financial aid scholarships following their admittance to college. Academic excellence is determined by their national university entrance exam results which are an overall aggregate score between 6 to10 of the university entrance requirement of a total score of 6-36 (6 being the best and 36 the worst). I will elaborate on the description of the participants in Chapter 3.

Success

For this dissertation, success is defined as positive academic, personal, and social adjustment in college and will be mainly determined by the student's positive academic achievement— as indicated by a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 3.00/4.00 or higher. Success also requires that students are on track to complete the college degree. Success would also capture their outlook on their academic aspiration, such as a positive belief that they are in control (agency). Finally, success would also entail the participants' definition of what educational success means to them. Specifically, I will be working with students in their senior year who have maintained academic success through their Freshman, Sophomore, and Junior years.

Deficiency-Based Research

Deficiency-Based Research assesses students based on their weaknesses or limitations instead of their strengths. This type of research is framed from an approach that characterizes difference as an indicator that the "other" is lacking some essential normative feature (Gorski, 2011). Due to the many barriers confronting college access and the persistence of FGLISs, these obstacles often overshadow their strengths and dominate how they are perceived and conceptualized. Deficit ideology, as defined by Gorski (2011), is "a sort of 'blame-the-victim' mentality applied, not to a person, but systemically, to an entire group of people, often based upon a single dimension of identity" (p.154). In the case of FGLISs, for instance, this identity often focuses on what they do not have and often forms a constraint and is used to describe who they are instead of what they have and their aspirations. George, for instance, challenges this generalization and makes a case of how their identities both individually and collectively should be viewed as a people with aspirations of doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs, and not just one identity.

Thus, a deficit approach would essentialize all LISs and label them as lacking. FGLISs, therefore, suffer negative systemic labeling based on barriers they have to overcome without an examination of the sociopolitical and systemic structures which favors one class over the other. Examples of inequalities include limited school facilities and resources, an unqualified teacher in schools situated in poor communities, unfair labor markets, and so on (Gorski, 2011; Yosso, 2005). The source and cause of the deficit are not seen as a structural outcome, and individuals who suffer from its consequences are viewed and labeled as the problem (Gorski, 2011).

Asset-Based Research

As a counter approach to deficit-based research, Asset-Based Research focuses on the positive attributes of students instead of their weakness. It is a departure from characterizing the

student as 'lacking' by focusing on positive qualities possessed by students, which can be highlighted, validated, and guided to be used for their academic success. There is a growing call for Asset-Based Research to be used when studying students from marginalized backgrounds (Harper, 2010; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Kouyoumdjian, Guzman, Garcia & Talavera-Bustillo, 2015; Rendon, 1994; Yosso, 2005).

Capital

In his chapter "The Forms of Capital" French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) categorizes capital in three forms: economic, social, and cultural and further explains that economic capital is the basis of all other capitals. Bourdieu additionally argues that the knowledge of the upper and middle classes is considered *capital* [italicized for emphasis] that is valuable for the individual to rise in a hierarchical society. He states, "if one is not born into a family whose knowledge is already deemed valuable, one could then access the knowledge of the middle and upper class and the potential for social mobility through formal schooling" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977 as cited in Yosso, 2005, p.70). By this argument, although FGLISs might have some form of capital, it is not recognized by the ruling class who dominate the academic space. In this dissertation, *capital* will mean the various forms of resources available to LISs, mobilized through their investments, relationships, experiences and engagements over time, which they leverage for profitable returns in their academic pursuits.

Community Cultural Wealth Model

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) is a model which emphasizes understanding the various resources embedded in communities of color used by minoritized and students of color to achieve academic excellence and resist systemic oppression and structures which hinder their academic success. Yosso (2005) developed CCW within a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework to :

> shift the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural poverty and disadvantages, instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged (p. 69).

Thus, CCW shifts the narrative from a deficit ideology to a strengths-based discourse, examining the cultural capital possessed by disadvantaged student populations (including FGLISs). In this study, participating FGLISs come from similar backgrounds of marginalization as those described in Yosso's CCW model. Hence this model will be useful in the process of examining *hustle*.

Cultural Capital

Kincheloe (2008) defines cultural capital as the ways through which "members in the dominant culture affords individuals ways of knowing, acting and being that can be "cashed in" to get ahead in the lived world" (p.110). In its simplest explanation, cultural capital is the institutionalized acceptable norms, codes, and assessment which are heavily determined by those in the upper and middle class which they pass on to their children to put them ahead. Per Lareau and Wieninger (2003), cultural capital can be described as "the direct or indirect 'imposition' of evaluative norms favoring the children or families of a particular social milieu" (p. 598). Thus, although culture is possessed by the sociability of the social class, it is the institutional evaluative norm, which gives it legitimacy. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) add that the upper and middle classes determine these institutional evaluative standards and are acquired by children from lower class families through schooling.

Social Capital

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) define social capital as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 119). Likewise, Lamont and Lareau (1988) assert that social capital can be considered a resource that can enhance profitability, increase productivity, and facilitate upward social mobility. Lin (2002) sums up the definition of social capital as "the resources embedded in social networks accessed and used by actors for actions" (pp. 24- 25). In the context of social capital in education, one's social capital can include being connected to a family or people familiar with the higher education system who can guide students to information, people, and resources in the educational system useful to obtain success.

Hustle

The American English dictionary defines *hustle* as one's ability "to do something with a lot of energy and determination." This definition is a useful starting point for the exploration of *hustle,* but this qualitative study seeks to report a thicker, richer understanding of *hustle* that is embedded in the multiple frameworks described above.

Chapter Summary

Although several studies have examined the barriers and challenges constraining students from first-generation low-income backgrounds from gaining access, persisting, and attaining a college degree, many of the existing studies use a deficit lens in assessing how FGLISs experience college and little focus of those who go on to succeed despite the barriers. Additionally, many of the current literature on FGLISs heavily concentrate on the experiences of such students in the Global North, which leaves out the experiences of similar students from sub-Saharan Africa. FGLISs are often the target of international educational funding organizations' scholarship

programs, thus leaving a significant gap in the knowledge of these students for higher education institutions globally who receive and work with them.

Additionally, the nonrecognition of the navigational capacities of FGLISs in the everyday teaching and co-curricular activities of the academy poses a threat to these students. Lack of recognition may force FGLISs to unlearn their unique cultural and familial ways of engagement (which they previously used to navigate through an unjust society). FGLISs' navigational skills, cultural capital (and presumably *hustle)* helped them to access higher education but once admitted may have worked in a state of marginalization, resulting in self-doubt and disbelief in their abilities and potential to succeed in college.

Despite these challenges, some students *hustle* their way through the sometimes unwelcoming and unfamiliar college environment using their life experiences and aspirations and persistence to succeed regardless of their lack of recognition and acceptance. Understanding how these groups of FGLISs operationalize that process is the focus of this study.

Preview of the Dissertation

The remaining sections of the dissertation will be presented in the following organization: Chapter Two will discuss bodies of literature focusing on FGLISs college success to identify areas where the literature is limiting and can be filled using this study. This section will be followed by a layout of the methodological approach and methods (Chapter Three), which will be employed in this study. Chapter Four will cover the full narratives of three focal students highlighting their experiences with *hustle*. Chapter Five will offer a cross-thematic presentation of the emerging themes across all 17 participants' stories and draw on their similarities and difference to provide the major findings of the study. The final section (Chapter Six) will focus on a discussion of the results and an analysis of the data using the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding this

study. It will also offer the implications, conclusions, and any recommendations for future studies. This section will also aim to provide practical ways of operationalizing the recommendations into concrete and practical strategies which can be adopted by higher education institutions, their faculty, and student services practitioners.

Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature

AKORFENA -Sword of war

Symbol of courage, valor, and heroism.

"You have to put in the hard work; there is no way around it." (Suzy, Interview, 6/17/17)

Introduction

In this second chapter of the dissertation, I situate FGLISs within the broader scholarly discourse of higher education to understand the different ways scholars have conceptualized their success in the academy. I will identify a gap in the current literature related to FGLISs, which will be the focus of my study, situating the work in existing studies about how students overcome such challenges to attain their postsecondary educational goals. The review of literature will take on the following organization:

The first body of literature is captioned *Varying Conceptualization of FGLISs in Higher Education*. This body of literature will provide the various ways FGLISs have been conceptualized in the higher education literature. I will focus on literature discussing their access, persistence, and educational attainment. In this section, I argue that the current literature often overemphasizes their deficit by paying more attention to what they do not have instead of the strengths they have and bring with them from their cultural and familial communities which can be viewed as useful assets for their educational success.

The second body of literature, *Conceptualizing FGLISs Success Through the Notion of Capital*, will review some of the dominant literature which conceptualizes student success through the concept of capital. Although various studies have used the idea of capital to understand the college outcomes of students, the concept of cultural and social capital and its impact on education has dominated higher education literature. I will, therefore, examine the various ways in which scholars have applied cultural and social capital to explore and interpret the educational success of FGLISs and identify some of the strengths and limitations of this body of literature.

In the third body, I will review literature from scholars who use an asset-based understanding of the various forms of capitals possessed by FGLISs and examine how this approach can be adapted to analyze the *capacity to hustle.* Predominantly, the third body will draw from the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) Model*,* which uses an asset approach to identify a community cultural wealth possessed by marginalized student populations. I am of the view that this could also be applied to FGLIS. I will then review the literature on Baxter Magolda's (1999) Self-authorship theory and discuss how it can shape our understanding of *hustling*.

Finally, I will situate hustle within the broader student persistence literature and discuss theories and concepts like resilience, hardiness, and grit, which has widely been used to understand FGLISs who have overcome significant barriers. I argue that while these Social Psychological approaches of understanding student persistence can foster our understanding of *hustle,* the capacity to *hustle* is more nuanced, culturally bounded, and extends beyond the individual's innate abilities. Hence, the need to explore these nuances to understand further how it can potentially offer a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of how some FGLISs who use this capacity to navigate their educational experiences may eventually succeed.

This chapter aims to explore the various concepts and scholarly works that can contribute to our understanding of *hustle* in the academic setting which has scarcely been researched but may be a different navigational capacity used by some FGLISs to achieve their educational goals. It is my hope that a deeper understanding of hustle in the academic context and how FGLISs use it as a navigational capacity will add to more recent studies which has shown that some FGLISs can overcome the barriers which threaten their educational success (Grcich, 2008; Harper, 2008; Kaplan, 2010; McLoughlin, 2011; Miracle, 2013). A deeper understanding will offer higher educational institutions an opportunity to learn from their experiences and strategies they use to succeed.

Varying Conceptualization of First-generation Low-Income Students in Higher Education

To understand the student population under study, it is crucial to know how they have been conceptualized in the higher education literature. Increasingly, FGLISs has been conceptualized through various categorizations. This review will focus on three main categorizations: College access, preparedness, and persistence once they gain access and degree completion. College access, is determined by the ability to pay for the cost of attending college (cost of tuition, room, and board), their capacity to navigate the college application process and their dependence on various forms of financial aid and grants to support their college attendance (Breier, 2010; Choy & Bobbitt,2000; Enberg & Allen, 2011; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hansen, 1983; Perna, 2005, 2010). College preparedness and persistence will focus on their ability to engage with the curriculum and the college environment effectively once they gain access (Engle & Lynch, 2011; Engle & Tinto,2008; Thayer, 2000; Tinto 2006; Walpole, 2011), the last body of literature will focus on their eventual degree completion (Berkner et al., 2002; Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Perna, Fester, & Walsh, 2010; Tinto 2006; Walpole, 2011). In the subsequent paragraphs, I will

elaborate on the various studies which have explained the three main categorizations listed above— access, persistence, and degree attainment— and highlight its drawbacks and gaps which may not facilitate a full understanding of FGLISs.

Access to Postsecondary Education

While the benefits of post-secondary education cannot be overemphasized, the decision to embark on this journey is influenced by multiple factors, affordability, academic qualification, type of education desired, and many more. Beyond the individual's intellectual capacity which can qualify them to qualify to be admitted into their desired post-secondary education, studies have shown that college affordability significantly determines who gains access and who is left behind (Engle & Lynch, 2011; Perna, 2005a). Choy & Bobbitt (2000) define such affordability as "the price of attending a postsecondary institution and what the student is expected to pay based on their family's financial circumstances" (p. iv). Choy and Bobbitt (2000) assert that many students from low-income families do not have the income to support the cost of college (tuition, room, and board) or have significant assets against which they can borrow to pay for the cost of post-secondary education for their children, hence needing substantial financial assistance to be able to attend college (Choy & Bobbitt, 2000).

Additionally, studies have shown that when they can secure the needed finances to enter college, many students from low-income backgrounds are unlikely to sustain payment of the cost of tuition, room, and board leading to their eventual drop-out (Breier, 2010; Gladieux & Perna, 2005; Titus, 2006). Breier's (2010) study, for example, focused on the experiences of low-income college students who drop out of college after they enrolled in various higher educational institutions in South Africa and concluded that the inability of students to continue their education was due to their failure to pay for the cost of attendance. Breier (2010) examined seven higher

education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa with a focus on the University of the Western Cape, which per the study "caters for a large proportion of impoverished students" (p. 657). Brieier used data from the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa as well as a postal questionnaire survey to gather data on students who left college before qualification versus those who graduated.

Relatedly, Tinto's (1993) study of a longitudinal model of student departure, which looks at the concept of student integration, placed a greater emphasis on students' ability to pay for their education and the time in the semester when their inability to pay poses as a threat to retention. The findings revealed that in South Africa, financially disadvantaged students included students who came from conditions of extreme poverty and deprivation and who also did not have access to many basic life requirements for survival (such as food, clothing, and shelter). Such resource shortcomings occurred even when enrolled in some form of financial assistance.

While Brier's 2010 study was situated in South Africa, this pattern of inability to pay and sustain payment seems to be a global phenomenon amongst low-income students worldwide. The consequence of not gaining and maintaining access because of financial inability results in FGLISs being deprived of the benefits of a post-secondary education consequently resulting in the continued struggle of FGLISs to improve their social and economic mobility in society forcing them to engage in multiple and sometimes many uncertain streams of income. Gladieux and Perna (2005), for instance, conducted a study in the United States using data from the U.S. Department of Education for students who first enrolled in postsecondary education in 1995–96, with a snapshot of the same students in 2001. The findings revealed that:

> Half of the students who enrolled in postsecondary education borrowed in 1995–96; more than 20% of those students dropped out of their educational programs yet were burdened with significant debt. They had, in effect, the worst of both worlds—they did not benefit

> from the higher income associated with education beyond high school, and they accumulated significant educational debt. Many of these students were unemployed in 2001 and defaulted on their loans, thus damaging their credit standing for the future. (p. iv)

Because of the above-listed challenges, students from low-income backgrounds were often less likely to access and sustain their enrollment in college and may not proceed after their high school education to attain postsecondary education unlike their peers from high and middle-income backgrounds whose parents have the required financial resources to support them. Additionally, students from high and middle-income backgrounds are likely to have parents who have attended college who could guide them with information on how to navigate the college application process, hence, are more likely to proceed to college after high school and remain enrolled. Choy (2001) asserted that students whose parents did not go to college, also known as first-generation students, are at a disadvantage when it comes to postsecondary education because they lack the critical information and guidance about the college process. Such guidance is readily available to their peers whose parents have a college certification. Choy (2001) further alludes that even when these students beat the odds to enroll in postsecondary education, they remain at a disadvantage to stay enrolled and attain their degrees.

Relatedly, Enberg and Allen (2002) argue that, in addition to their financial disadvantage, FGLISs typically also lack the needed guidance to navigate the college application process because they do not have parents who attended college or understand how college works. Brewer and Landers (2005) concur to this by adding that parents who have attended college tend to know how college works and are more likely to transfer this knowledge to their children. Thus, financial

ability and the needed guidance through the college application process greatly influences FGLISs college access and to college and their ability to remain in college.

Postsecondary Educational Preparedness and Persistence

Further to their financial disadvantage, many studies on the experiences of FGLISs have shown that even when the financial barrier to college access is removed, many FGLISs are not academically prepared to take on challenging programs, are largely in remediation programs. Additionally, they are generally not able to persist due to their lack of preparedness to do rigorous academic work at the college level (Adelman, 1999; Bui, 2002; Engle & Tinto,2008; Perna, 2005b; Thayer, 2000; Tinto 2006; Walpole, 2011). This lack of preparedness is connected to their socioeconomic disadvantage, which prevents them from attending well-resourced high schools and taking precollege programs which prepare them adequately for college-level academic work and socialization to life in college. Such programs aid them to navigate appropriately, engage and participate in academic and co-curricular activities that positively influence college persistence and successful outcomes (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

In his article, "Retention of Students from First Generation, and Low-Income Backgrounds," Thayer (2000) identified factors beyond finance which hinder the retention of first-generation and low-income students. These factors included low academic preparedness towards college as indicated by their low SAT and ACT scores. The lack of readiness of FGLISs was attributed to their attendance in under-resourced secondary schools with limited access to rigorous academic preparation. Low-resource schools may lack advanced placement classes in math and other courses which are designed to prepare students for college.

Adelman (1999) asserted that the high school curriculum has a significant impact on college success. He noted that students who take less rigorous high school classes in areas like

math are more likely to take more remedial courses in college and are less likely to graduate at the same rate as those who take advanced placement classes in high school. Furthermore, Adelman identified that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are likely to be less academically resourced[7] when they get to college than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds contributing to their inability to withstand the academic rigor of college. After FGLISs gain access and can maintain their admittance, Adelman, found that academic resource had a more significant impact on their college completion. For example, in his degree completion study of a cohort of students from high school through the sophomore year of college and across various socioeconomic groups, Adelman found that "students from the lowest two SES quintiles who are also in the highest Academic Resources quintile earn bachelor's degrees at a higher rate than a majority of students from the top SES quintile" (pp. 24-25), This finding suggests that with the right academic foundation, FGLISs may be able to navigate the educational environment to attain success.

In their report to the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education titled *Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low-Income, First-Generation Students*, Jennifer Engle and Vincent Tinto (2008) stated that in addition to their financial and limited knowledge of the academic system, low-income and first-generation students are less likely to be engaged in academic and social experiences that foster success in college. These experiences include studying in groups, interacting with faculty and other students, participating in extracurricular activities, and using support services. Connecting Engle and Tinto's study to Adelman's account of FGLISs

[7] Adelman defines academic resources as: a composite measure of the academic content and performance the student brings forward from secondary school into higher education. This measure is dominated by the intensity and quality of secondary school curriculum (Adelman, 1999, p. 8).

ability to succeed when they have an excellent academic foundation, it can be concluded that academic success is a result of a confluence of factors beyond financial ability.

Postsecondary Educational Attainment

Despite the lack of financial ability, academic preparedness and having parents who have themselves been to college to help them gain access and succeed, studies indicate that access to postsecondary education has improved for FGLISs (Brennan & Shah, 2003) but are however graduating college completion at a much lower rate compared to their peers from more affluent backgrounds. Miller, Valle, Engle, and Cooper (2014) noted that FGLISs are graduating from college at a much lower rate than their peers from high and middle-income backgrounds. In an "Access to Attainment" report submitted to the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), the authors stated that "most young people living in poverty do not reap the benefits of a college education. Fewer than 1 in 10 will earn bachelor's degrees by age 24, compared with 7 in 10 from high-income families" (p. 8). Engle and Tinto (2008) analyzed data from the National Center for Education Statistics and concluded that "low-income, first-generation students experience less success than their peers right from the start" (p. 2). Their analysis revealed that across all institutional types:

> Low-income, first-generation students were nearly four times more likely – 26 to 7 percent - to leave higher education after the first year than students who had neither of these risk factors. Six years later, nearly half (43 percent) of low-income, first-generation students had left college without earning their degrees. Among those who left, almost two-thirds (60 percent) did so after the first year. After six years, only 11 percent of low-income, first-generation students had earned bachelor's degrees compared to 55 percent of their more advantaged peers. (p. 2)

Higher education institutions have therefore come under close and intense scrutiny due to the challenge of low college attainment rate especially for FGLISs and are challenged to go beyond access to ensure that the students they admit graduate (Engle, & Tinto, 2008; Complete College America, 2013). For instance, higher education institutions are being asked to take on an entirely different approach to helping students who may need remediation by adopting co-requisite remediation programs. In these programs, the least academically prepared students take remedial courses focusing on reading, writing, and math, alongside other coursework. This model offers remediation independent of the regular academic classes to be taken by students once they are enrolled in college (Complete College America, 2013). In support, scholars like Vincent Tinto (2002) have also made a similar observation about the low graduation rate of FGLISs. In his presentation titled "Enhancing student persistence: Connecting the dots" Tinto argued that for underrepresented and low-income students to succeed in college, they must be given real opportunities to persist and succeed beyond the entry.

Tinto called upon higher education institutions to ensure that students who gain access are better challenged to succeed. He also called for students to be better advised and supported in their academic journey to make choices that will give them a better road map towards graduation. While the outlined conceptualizations of FGLISs are helpful because it points to some of the barriers they face to gaining access and attaining success, scholars focusing on only the obstacles facing FGLISs have been criticized because they are silent on those who sail through successfully despite these barriers to success and how they are able to navigate the challenges outlined above. In the ensuing sections, I will describe some of the limitations of the various conceptualizations outlined above

and propose alternative approaches to a more holistic approach to understanding FGLISs college attainment.

Deficit conceptualization and Limitation

The above categorization of FGLISs is very useful in helping higher education institutional agents, including faculty and administrators who work with FGLISs to understand some of the limitations and barriers FGLISs face. However, the studies above tend to problematize the students like the ones lacking what it takes to fit into the academy rather than interrogating how academic institutions have failed to support these students. (Engle &Tinto 2008; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Additionally, previous studies have conceptualized FGLISs through a deficit lens by heavily focusing on what they lack rather than focusing on their assets (Colyar, 2011; Gorski, 2011; Rendon, 1994; Yosso, 2005). For instance, none of the studies listed above highlighted the assets or strengths possessed by FGLISs beyond their financial inability, academic preparedness and lack of proper socialization to understand the admission process and how college works due to having parents who are not college goers.

Gorski (2011) identifies "deficit ideologies as approaching students, based upon our perceptions of their weaknesses rather than their strengths" (p. 152). According to Colyar (2011), such deficit categorization of FGLISs further privileges their already privileged peers from upper and middle-class backgrounds as "their experiences serve as the normative measuring stick" used to assess FGLISs (p. 125). Colyar further explained that "When 'traditional' students' experiences serve as the norm; these experiences are also reified as traditional" (p. 125). Colyar asserts that deficit frames disadvantage FGLISs because their experiences are then portrayed as being inferior to that of their peers from high and middle-income backgrounds. Furthermore, Colyar contends that negative descriptors like "at risk," "non-traditional," and "less prepared" also set FGLISs up as failures or potential failures even before they begin their academic work and invalidates

whatever skill or abilities they bring to the academy. Rendon (1994), reiterates Colyer's assertation and adds that practices which invalidate the experiences of FGLISs may impact their sense of belonging, contribute to self-doubt, and may foster disbelief in their ability to succeed in the academy. Colyar further argues that instead of focusing on what FGLISs as the sole contributors of what they lack, academic institutions must equally examine the structural inequalities which may cause significant barriers and ultimately contribute to their inability to succeed. Some of these structural inequalities may include unequal access to pre-collegiate preparation as well as unequal employment opportunities, which position families of FGLISs in conditions of vulnerability and disadvantage while privileging their high and middle-income counterparts (Colyar, 2011; Kezar, 2011; Kezar, Walpole & Perna, 2015; Walpole, 2011).

Thus, FGLISs may be positioned as the problem instead of the victims affected by the unequal structures in higher education. Bergerson (2007), for instance, argued that higher education institutions reproduce inequalities against students from low-income backgrounds through their programs, structures, and policies. Bergerson challenges institutions to "take a close look at their values and assumptions influencing their ways of operating to see how current social and power structures are reproduced within their walls" (p. 116) and address such assumptions and values to make the higher education environment fit for all who gain access.

My purpose for highlighting the various ways in which FGLISs have been categorized through a deficit lens in some of the higher education literature is because language is powerful, and has consequences. While understanding these categorizations is helpful to comprehend the challenges FGLISs encounter to gain access, persist and succeed, these categorizations leaves out the experiences of those who despite these challenges can navigate sometimes hostile and unwelcoming higher education institutional structures to succeed. Instead, it places the entire

responsibility to succeed on FGLISs and not on the academic institution. In the section that follows, I extend the conceptualization of FGLISs success to the notion of capital to examine further some of the dominant theories used to understand FGLISs success. I argue that some of the ways some scholars use some of these theories could be problematic when applied in a very individualistic way, which in turn does not reflect the communal cultural backgrounds of many marginalized populations from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Explicitly, I draw from the social and cultural capital theory.

Capital Theory Conceptualizing of FGLSs'

Social Capital Theory

Many studies have been conducted to understand the relationship between social capital and education (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Carnoy, Gove, & Marshall, 2007 ; Coleman, 1988; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Field, 2008, Halpern, 2005, Kim & Schneider, 2005; Perna & Titus, 2005; Putnam, 1993). In this section, I will focus on three foundational scholars whose work has influenced the literature and conceptualization of social capital— Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam— about the college success of FGLISs. Even though these three scholars write extensively and broadly on the concept of social capital and education, this review will focus on aspects of their conceptualizations that can be applied to higher education, FGLISs, and their educational attainment.

Bourdieu argued that capital come in three primary forms: economic, cultural, and social and concluded that economic capital is the basis of all capital. Economic capital combines with the other types of capital to reproduce inequalities. Related to economic capital, Bourdieu defined social capital as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual

acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). According to Bourdieu (1984), social capital consists of one's social connections and sociability and how he/she uses those connections to obtain benefits. Regarding education, Bourdieu argues that schools, through their pedagogy, reproduce social class by maintaining the culture of the ruling class, allowing them to preserve their power and dominance (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Grenfell (2014) further adds that: "the pedagogic action is not, as is normally claimed, aimed at equal opportunity within the education system; rather it is constituted according to principles upon which the forms and content of teaching and learning are created- which are grounded in a particular class culture— that of the dominant classes (pp. 156-157). In the specific case of FGLISs, unequal representation in pedagogy may include omissions related to their culture, the experiences and mastries gathered over the years to navigate severe conditions and a lack of recognition for the networking and connections that occur in their communities. This lack of acknowledgment of the social capital of FGLISs in the pedagogy further disadvantages them because, according to Rendon (1994), isolation, doubt, and low self-efficacy arise when the dominant class culture is the norm in institutions.

Bourdieu's conceptualization of social capital, however, has been criticized for being too focused on the economically privileged and how they perpetuate their dominance without the recognition that other groups might also possess some form of positive social capital both within and outside of their kin (Granovetter, 1973; Yosso, 2005). For FGLISs, social capital may consist of the types of resources that accrue to them through their relation, membership, and connections with their immediate and extended families, their peers, their schools, churches, social group, and their cultural communities. These forms of capital embedded in FGLISs, however, tend not to be

recognized in the academic settings because they are usually unfamiliar to those in the dominant culture (Gorski, 2008; Rendon, 1994; Yosso, 2005).

According to Gorski (2008), this lack of understanding by the dominant class in the academic setting could also lead to misinterpreting FGLISs as having deficits (not having the same forms of social capital as the dominant class). As previously mentioned in this case too, deficit models may position FGLISs as students with problems that need to be "fixed" to resemble the dominant class through their resocialization and acculturation with the pedagogy (Dudley-Marling, 2007; Valencia, 1997; Weiner, 2006; Yosso, 200). Similarly, Field (2008) critiqued Bourdieu for neglecting any adverse effects social capital might have on disenfranchised and disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, although social capital is situated within social structures, Bourdieu did not address how those structures can impact the attainment and use of social capital (Granovetter, 1973) which disadvantages many FGLISs because many of their connections were within their social structures especially within the extended family.

Unlike Bourdieu, James Coleman (1990) presents a much broader view of social capital beyond the dominant culture and class. Coleman defined social capital as "consisting of two elements: it is an aspect of social structure and facilitates certain actions of individuals within the structure" (p. 302). Thus social capital is embedded in social structures like family, educational institutions, religious affiliations, and the relationships and interactions within these structures. Coleman's work is heavily based on family and communities, and the various ways children are impacted by their family's social capital (or lack thereof), which led to his expanded definition of social capital as:

> The set of resources that inhere in family relations and community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person. These

> resources differ for different persons and can constitute an essential advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital. (Coleman, 1990, p. 300)

For Coleman, social and human capital are complementary and are both critical in the cognitive development of children toward educational outcomes. This complementarity is evident in several of Coleman's studies, which examine social capital in educational settings and among various groups of students, especially at high school level (Coleman, 1961; Coleman, 1988; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). Coleman's conceptualization is particularly salient to this study and provides an excellent overview of the social capital of marginalized groups like FGLISs. Referring to the opening epigraph in chapter ones, Adam (a student) asserts: "The thought of where I came from, and my family back home motivated me to keep pushing. I know how to *hustle,* so I never thought of quitting" (Adam, personal communication, June 27th, 2016). Attributes in Adam's statement reflect a communal and collective motivation to continue persisting to succeed that align with Coleman's explanations of social capital. In this case, Adam drew from his relation with his disadvantaged family at home who depended on him to succeed, most likely, so he will be able to help alleviate their economic disadvantage.

Finally, about social capital, American political scientist Robert Putnam extended the thinking about social capital among family and school to include communities and society (Putnam, 1993, 1995). Putnam recognized social capital theory for its ability to foster collective social action, relying on the norms, values, and trust of the society. This view diverges from Bourdieu's concept of social capital as individualistic, to a conception of social capital as a collective, public good. Putnam (2000) also introduced three types of social capital: bridging, bonding, and synergy. Bridging social capital represents an open network, which is inclusive and available to all. Bonding social capital is exclusive to specific members. Synergy social capital

involves cooperation between governments, communities, and organizations for a common outcome or goal, like the development of culturally relevant educational practices, and participation of community leaders in the development of responsive school policies. Putnam explains that all three forms of social capital are useful for different purposes. This conceptual addition is particularly helpful for this study because it suggests the FGLISs could engage in bridging to reach outside their perceived "disadvantaged" network of their families to gain access to other forms of valuable social capital for themselves.

Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam's different conceptualizations of social capital are each useful in understanding the different ways that social capital can impact FGLISs and their college attainment. While Bourdieu contends that social capital is a resource available to the privileged in society which highlights how FGLISs can be marginalized in the academic setting in terms of their acceptance and engagements in the academy, Coleman, on the other hand, argues that social capital could also be available to disadvantaged groups through their families, communities and other extended connections beyond their kinship. Finally, Putnam theorized that the investment in social capital could be made across the entire society and can be acquired if one does not possess enough benefits in his or her immediate family.

Other scholars have expanded on the work of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam in conceptualizing social capital in relation to the educational attainment of FGLISs which highlights other ways in which these population of students' academic success is conceptualized through the social capital lens. For example, Lamont and Lareau (1988) assert that social capital can be considered a resource that can enhance profitability, increase productivity, and facilitate upward social mobility. Lin (2002) summed up the definition of social capital as "the resources embedded in social networks accessed and used by actors for actions" (pp. 24- 25). Lin (2002) explained that

social capital works because it: 1) facilitates information sharing among its members which could promote and influence the choices made by the individuals who have access to the information; 2) exerts influence on the agents making the decision on behalf of the members activating it; 3) certifies social credentials, thus social capital performs what Lin terms as "standing behind" (p. 20); and 4) endorses and reinforces identity and recognition, thus reaffirming one's social status and credibility to benefit from profits that members of that group enjoy. Social capital, therefore, grants public acknowledgment of one's claim to resources and reinforces their entitlement to the benefits accruing to the group (Lin, 2002).

Social capital can be improved for the individual by creating and sustaining many different relationships to facilitate access to resources which can positively influence the educational outcome (Rios-Aguillar & Deil-Amen, 2012). Although Coleman and Putnam's work suggests a more communal and broader conceptualization of social capital in ways that reflect the cultural and socialization of FGLISs, scholars studying the impact of social capital on the educational outcome of FGLIS tend to do so through a Bordieuan lens, resulting in analyzing FGLISs from a very individualistic perspective. Such a lens may ignore how marginalized groups enact social capital from communal cultural backgrounds (Rios-Aguillar & Deil-Amen, 2012). I will discuss this criticism in the subsequent sections.

Cultural Capital Theory

Bourdieu first used the notion of cultural capital to explain the educational attainment of children from different social classes which attributed academic success (or failure) to the intentional socialization of children from the dominant class to gain advantage in the institutionalized setting of the academy, which was heavily influenced by the norms and socialization of the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986). Extending on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, Kincheloe (2008) added that cultural capital can be described as the ways through

which "members in the dominant culture affords individuals ways of knowing, acting and being that can be 'cashed in' to get ahead in the lived world" (p. 110). Cultural capital can also be described as the institutionalized acceptable norms, and codes which upper-class individuals pass on to their children to push them ahead (Lareau, 2003).

Lareau and Wieninger (2003), for instance, contend that cultural capital is "the direct or indirect 'imposition' of evaluative norms favoring the children or families of a particular social milieu" (p. 598). Thus, although the sociability of social class[8] possesses cultural capital, it is the institutional evaluative norm, which gives it legitimacy. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) add that the upper and middle class determines these institutional evaluative standards and are acquired by children from lower class families through schooling. Cultural capital, then, can be used to explain how one's socialization and upbringing prepares them to engage effectively in various social settings while giving them access to the dominant norms and acceptable institutionalized forms of practices and behaviors. These ways of engagement are not formally taught but silently guide everyday interactions in academic institutions. Jane Rolande Martin (1994) called it the *hidden curriculum*. This hidden curriculum is not so apparent to everyone but determines what constitutes institutional standards and practices and is profoundly shaped by the dominant culture in the academy (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Martin, 1994).

Social and Cultural Capital and Educational Outcomes of FGLISs

Educational scholars often use Bourdieu's social and cultural capital theories to explain the educational outcome of FGLISs (Choy, 2001; Lareau, 2003; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Walpole, 2003, 2008). Lareau (2003), for example, asserted that children from high and middle-income

[8] Jehangir (2010) explains that "while income may be a numerical determining of one's financial worth, social class captures the nature of one's life experiences, aspirations, and family expectations, said and unsaid, as shaped by income, work, domicile, and family history: (p. 15)

backgrounds gain their social capital through a process of concerted cultivation where their families purposefully expose and place them in social structures. According to Lareau (2003), these experiences help them to gain membership to groups at a very early age before getting to college. On the contrary, some scholars assert that children from low-income backgrounds, are often in charge of their development and often miss making critical connections and relationships accrued from intentionally joining particular socially structured groups (Gupton et al. 2009).

Connecting social and cultural capital to their education, Walpole (2003) asserts that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds might not have prior socialization related to active learning practices and habits, exposure to resources that could impact their education like books, libraries, and effective use of learning tool. Walpole found that students with a low socioeconomic status who attended four-year colleges had lower academic attainment compared to their peers from high socioeconomic backgrounds. They also did not invest in the university structures, and programs like extracurricular activities spent more time on schoolwork and built relationships with faculty and peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. On the contrary, students from high and middle-class backgrounds and high socioeconomic backgrounds are socialized to engage in these activities as part of their upbringing, hence increasing the likelihood of them doing same once they get to college.

Relatedly, Stuber (2011) further argued that social and cultural capital works for students from high and middle-income backgrounds because the collegiate environment endorses and validates their cultural experiences. Students from low-income backgrounds, however, experience feelings of anxiety and a low sense of belonging, which may impact their sense of self-efficacy and ability to succeed because they are not familiar with the cultural norms and socialization required to "fit" in the collegiate environment.

Reay, Crozier, and Clayton ‘s (2009) study of working-class low-income students in a Southern Elite University further revealed that when FGLISs found themselves in such unfamiliar cultural environments, they experience the “fish out of water” phenomenon where the norms of their new academic environment clashes or is in a state of mismatch with their cultural norms, values, and socialization. Stephens et al. (2012) argued that first-generation students who experience both economic disadvantage and lack of academic preparedness tend to experience this cultural mismatch due to their socialization; they tend to be more interdependent than the current higher educational socialization of being dependent. He further alludes that this causes negative emotions among students from interdependence cultures when they get to college. He compares student success when they experience a mismatch to the extent to which the institution’s acceptable ways of engagement matches with theirs and advocates that academic institutions should reframe their culture to include interdependent norms of FGLISs.

In sum, students from middle and high-income backgrounds, through the process of social and cultural capital possessions mainly from their families, tend to be intentionally socialized by their families in ways that prepare them to be familiar with how higher education works. Therefore, the college culture matches with their cultural values and norms, facilitating a smooth transaction for their engagement in college. Some of the studies reviewed, on the other hand, indicate that FGLISs come to the academy with mismatched cultural values and norms which hinder their ability to navigate the college culture. Consequently, their smooth transition into college and experience of the academic environment which fosters inclusion and supportive practices to succeed are further hindered.

Criticism of Social and Cultural Capital Theories

Although social and cultural capital theories are useful in helping with the understanding of the different social positioning of FGLISs, the two theories have come with some criticism. Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen (2012) argue that this theoretical approach treats students as either having social or cultural capital, which makes them academically successful or lacking cultural and social capital and therefore not being successful or failing academically as a result of not having these forms of capitals. According to the authors, such analyses lacked nuance. In the college environment, FGLISs are often characterized as not possessing enough or significant social and cultural capital needed for academic success, hence resulting in them failing or needing to be "fixed" with more social and cultural capital to help them to succeed. This kind of theoretical analysis does not just take on a lack or deficit approach but also fails to take into account the nuances within the FGLISs group to recognize those who manage to accrue all forms of other capitals which may perform the same function as social and cultural capitals (Yosso, 2005).

Secondly, although social and cultural capital operates within social structures, the phenomenon is often attributed to the individual within the social structure without considering how the social structures may affect or impact their social and cultural capital (Granovetter, 1973; Sandefur & Laumann, 1998). This criticism is exemplified in the quote from Adam in the sections above. As individuals, FGLISs may be lacking social or cultural capital but when placed in the cultural community (what Adam refers to as home or where he draws his motivation to "keep pushing") can act as a significant source of social capital. Finally, there are several instances where FGLISs have thrived in universities, debunking the notion that the FGLISs status is a predictor of failure (Grcich, 2008; Harper, 2008; Kaplan, 2010; McLoughlin, 2011; Miracle, 2013). To this end, it is vital to move beyond identifying barriers and constraints and shifting to an approach which offers a deeper understanding of some of the strengths and capabilities FGLISs possess and

bring to the academy which could foster their success (Gorski, 2008; Harper, 2010; Kim &Hargrove, 2013; Rendon, 1994; Yosso, 2005). It is also significant not to generalize FGLISs as one homogeneous group but one is possessing several diversities which impact their experiences and outcomes differently.

Strengths-based Conceptualization of FGLISs

A strengths-based approach to researching the experiences of FGLISs offers the opportunity to understand how they overcome significant barriers to succeed, despite their many disadvantages (Harper, 2010). Additionally, a strengths-based approach provides insights into institutional actions which support and facilitate FGLISs' success by shaping our understanding of how they engage with these positive institutional functions, systems, people, processes, and policies (Rendon, 1994). Furthermore, a strengths-based approach could deepen our understanding of the unique assets possessed by FGLISs such as their persistence, the wealth they draw from their communities, their ability to positively self-author and use their skills and capabilities acquired from their life experiences prior to arriving at college to gain mastery of the academic system to facilitate their success.

This strengths-based approach to researching FGLISs success offers an opportunity to understand the experiences of those who are overcoming the barriers and constraints they face to succeed (Harper, 2010; Jehangir, Stebleton, Deenanath, 2015). There is a growing body of scholars approaching research on FGLISs' experiences and conditions in the academy that facilitate a strengths-based framework (Bergerson, 2007; Colyar, 2011; Frereir 1993; Hooks, 1994; Jehangir, 2010; Rendon, 1994, Thayer, 2000; Yosso, 2005, Walpole, 2011). Some of the ways in which FGLIS success has been conceptualized through asset-based and strength-based approaches have been through studies which advocate for institutional change to reflect the new demographics of

students being admitted to the academy including FGLISs (Bergerson, 2007; Jehangir, 2010; Rendon, 1994).

Rendon's (1994) validation theory, for instance, offers a new way of theorizing success in college for students who may have suffered invalidation, those who may have difficulties in getting involved in the educational experience, and those who have self-doubt in their ability to succeed (p.12). Validation is defined as:

> the intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents (i.e. faculty, student, and academic affairs staff, family members, peers) in order to: 1) validate students as creators of knowledge and as valuable members of the College learning community and 2) foster personal development and social adjustment" (Linares, & Muñoz, 2011, p. 12).

According to Rendon (2002), validating FGLISs promotes a growth environment for them because: 1) There is a focus on the total student experience and development and not just academic growth; 2) Validation theory re-centers the narrative and gives voice to FGLISs and their experiences; 3) There is a transformative experience for both the institutional agents involved in the validation process and the student is validated; 4) There is a focus on what FGLISs have rather than what they do not have and uses those assets as familiar tools for their success, and 5) Academic institutions play a proactive role in engaging with FGLISs rather than expecting them to change to look more like their high and middle-income peers. Rendon's validation theory has been used in many studies as a theoretical framework to understand low-income and first-generation and minority students (Gupton, Castelo Rodriguez, Martinez, & Quintanar, 2007; Rendon, 2002; Stein, 2006; Vasquez, 2007). It has also been used to understand student success (Bragg, 2001; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Chaves, 2006; Jain, 2010; Jalomo, 1995).

Like the validation theory, another asset-based approach used by scholars focuses on the change in institutional practices and the academic curriculum to reflect a learning environment welcoming of the experiences and stories of FGLISs. Jehangir (2010), for example, examined how colleges can better support first-generation and low-income students' learning experiences in a college environment through Multicultural Learning Communities (MLC), in which a multicultural curriculum and critical pedagogical approach are used to center students' lived experiences through their narratives. In her study "Stories as Knowledge: Bringing the Lived Experience of First-Generation College Students into the Academy", Jehangir used qualitative data from reflective writing and retrospective interviews to demonstrate how "first-generation students are validated as knowers and can cultivate a sense of belonging at the academy when their cultural wealth is incorporated into the classroom space" (p. 533). This kind of approach centers the experiences of the students and highlights what works and contributes to their success instead of what they lack.

Similarly, Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model takes on a critical approach to previous ways in which FGLISs have been conceptualized and offers an alternative model of understanding the various assets that FGLISs (and other marginalized groups) bring with them from their cultural communities. Unlike Bourdieu's cultural capital which has been criticized for its individualistic analysis of the student (Granovetter, 1973; Sandefur & Laumann, 1998), Yosso places emphasis on the wealth the student draws from his or her cultural community and the various ways the collective aspirations and goals of the community may lead to the student's success. A significant feature of the CCW model is that it focuses on collective notions of capital, rather than the individually formed capital embedded in social relations. I now present an in-depth analysis of Yosso's (2005) CCW model to give an example of how FGLISs can be studied from

an asset-based approach and draw on the various nuances that are often not considered in analyzing this group of students and their potential for success.

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) Framework

As a counter-narrative to the capital deficit conceptualization of FGLISs success, Yosso (2005) argues that FGLISs, like other marginalized groups of students, come to the academy with "various forms of wealth nurtured through their cultural communities. These forms of capital include aspirational capital, navigational capital, social capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, and resistant capital" (p. 69). Yosso contends that disadvantaged and marginalized students use these forms of capital in various ways to succeed in the academy. In the ensuing sections, I discuss the six forms of capital proposed by Yosso and highlight some of the existing studies supporting the use of these forms of capital. A graphical representation of Yosso's model is found in *Figure 2* below.

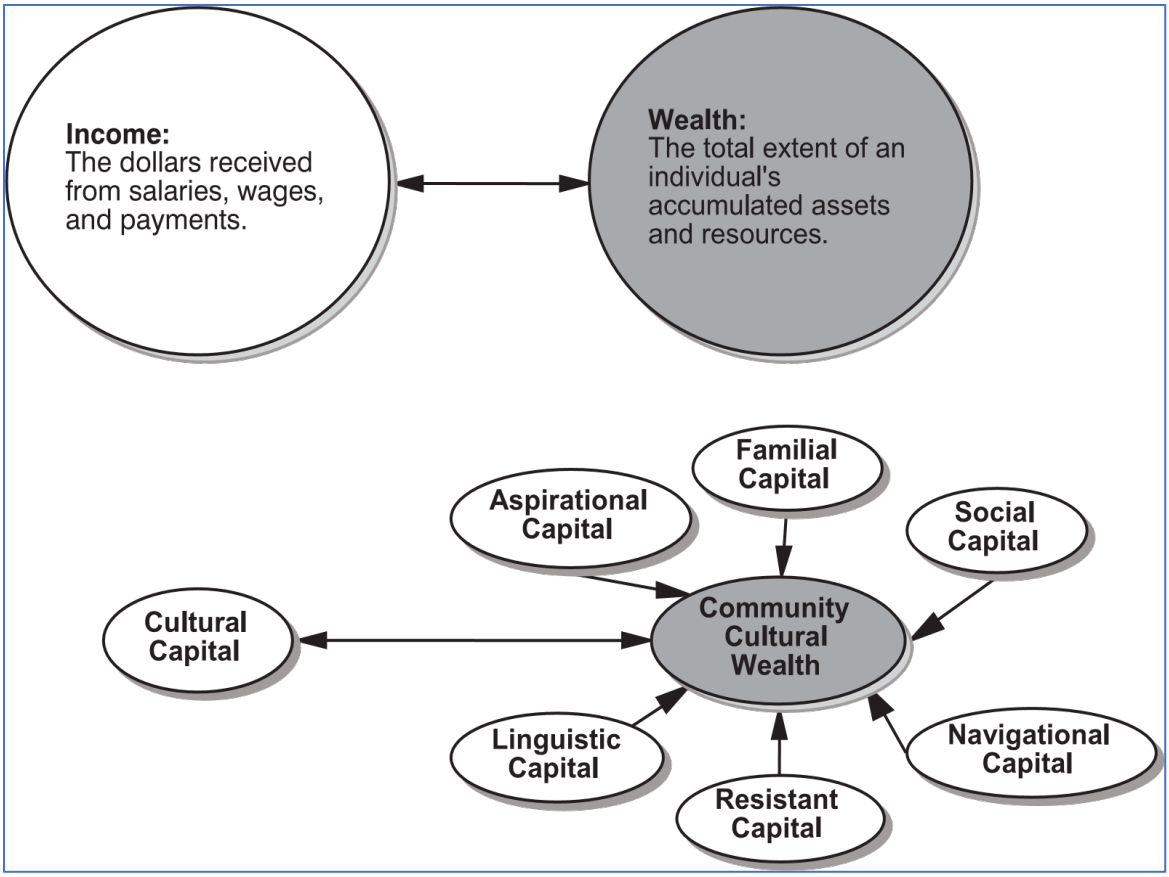


Figure 2: Community Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso, 2005, p. 78).

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital refers to the many aspirations held by FGLISs and their families to succeed and increase their life chances in the face of adverse difficulties and structural barriers. According to Yosso (2005), this type of capital represents the "hopes and dreams" students have concerning their future. Although FGLISs face significant barriers, their educational aspirations and desires to improve their lives and that of their families and communities motivates them to continue to strive even in the face of many socioeconomic difficulties. Yosso contends that academic institutions must, therefore, recognize these aspirations of FGLISs and use them as a means of motivating them to work hard towards their success instead of perceiving them as being lazy and uninterested in their education.

Linguistic Capital

In addition to their aspirational capital, students from marginalized groups (including LISs) tend to have many linguistic abilities which are not valued, despite the many efforts and promotion of multilingual capabilities for today's college students. Sophisticated linguistic knowledge characterizes the many language aptitudes of LI students who gain mastery and memorization of processes like storytelling and acting as interpreters for their families. Yosso further argues that storytelling is a linguistic and communication capacity which requires gaining command over skills such as attention to details and other unique abilities entailed in engaging with people.

Yosso refers to Marjorie Faulstich Orellana (2003) who "examines bilingual children who are often called upon to translate for their parents or other adults and finds that these youth gain multiple social tools of "vocabulary, audience awareness, cross-cultural awareness, 'real-world' literacy skills, math skills, metalinguistic awareness, teaching and tutoring skills, civic and familial responsibility, [and] social maturity." (p. 6). Thus, some FGLISs possess vital skills that they apply to the complicated academic settings they encounter in the college environment that may be new to them, hence contributing to their ability to thrive.

Familial Capital

Yosso's familial capital refers to one's sense of connection to their communities and kin, which teaches them about the importance of having a strong sense of community, support for one another, sharing similar histories and traditions and the importance of community association. FGLISs may, therefore, have a strong connection to their broader extended families and communities and their resources, which they tap into for advice and other support beyond their immediate kin. This concept aligns with Coleman (1988) and Putnam's (1995) conceptualization of how social and cultural capital could be acquired. In the academy, this strong sense of community draws these students together to share in their everyday challenges and successes

which serve as strong support for them. Familial capital reinforces the interdependency and communal living of marginalized communities as opposed to the very independent and individualistic values and norms which tend to dominate many high- and middle-income families' ways of life (Stephens, Townsend, Markus & Phillips, 2012).

Per Degado-Gaitan (2001), in practicing interdependence "isolation is minimized as families 'become connected with others around common issues' and realize they are 'not alone in dealing with their problems" (p. 54). According to Yosso (2005), this strong sense of community, if recognized, has a potential to impact FGLISs' sense of belonging and may counter the intense feeling of isolation which they sometimes experience when they arrive in non-familiar academic environments. There is a large body of literature which has shown evidence of the ability of learning communities to foster learning and academic success (Jehangir, 2009; Lenning, & Ebbers, 1999; Shapiro & Levine, 1999; Tinto, 1998, 2003). This sense of community, when made available to FGLISs provides them with familiar support to enhance their success.

Social Capital

Contrary to the view that FGLISs do not have significant social capital because their families do not have college experiences, Yosso (2005) argues that everybody has some form of capital. FGLISs are connected to their families, peers, and communities, which were previously described as having a strong sense of care for each other and sharing resources and experiences within the community. This connection to their extended families and communities thus widens their social networks, which in turn increases the availability of resources to them.

FGLISs can, consequently, obtain useful information from relatives, friends of these relations, their peers, and many other non-kin ties. For instance, in a study on the impact of communities on public and private schools, Coleman and Hoffer (1987) found that social capital

is attributable to the effects of community norms on parents and pupils, which reinforced teachers' expectations for their students. The study concluded that communities can be a significant source of social capital and can offset some of the economic and social disadvantages within the family. This finding is particularly important for low-income students given the diverse mix of people in the higher education system who can serve as their community throughout their educational trajectories, particularly during their college years.

Navigational Capital

Yosso goes on to expand community cultural wealth to include navigational capital, which she referred to as "skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color [and, by extension, FGLISs] in mind" (p. 80). In a study on some of the factors contributing to the academic success of Mexican American students, Alva (1991) described such students as being academically invulnerable and attribute their academic success to their ability to "sustain high level of achievement, motivation, and performance, despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly in school and, ultimately dropping out of school" (p. 19). Yosso contends that marginalized communities develop various strategies for survival from many social and systemic inequalities they have encountered.

These strategies outlined by Yosso are passed on to their children like how wealthy parents pass on strategies for maintaining their privilege to their children. Students from marginalized communities learn these "strategies to navigate through racially-hostile university campuses" (p. 80) as a result of their experiences in negotiating similar systemic conditions in their cultural communities. These hostile environments could also comprise of unfamiliar learning styles, exposure to diversity which may vary from what they are familiar to, example peers from high socioeconomic backgrounds, the assumption by faculty of what FGLIS "should" possess and

academic structures which do not make consideration of their experiences and what they bring to the academy.

Resistance Capital

Finally, Yosso defined resistance capital as "those knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80). Despite their economic marginalization and disadvantage, FGLISs are likely to possess a strong sense of cultural knowledge formed collectively within their cultural communities and exhibited in various forms of resistance to the popular and high-class socialization the academy sometimes imposes on them. Yosso used the example from Ward (1996), in which a group of African-American mothers intentionally raised their daughters "to assert themselves as intelligent, beautiful, strong, and worthy of respect to resisting the barrage of societal messages devaluing Blackness and belittling Black women" (Yosso, 2005. p. 81) to highlight how resistance capital is developed in communities.

In his study on how students from low socioeconomic statuses (SES) navigated the University of Pennsylvania, Grcich (2008) found that low SES students resisted taking up class behaviors and socialization as well as aspiration of their peers from high and middle-class backgrounds. Instead, they stayed genuine and connected to their communities and defined success by their terms. Grcich's study demonstrated that:

> The participants were acquiring an education that will provide social and cultural mobility. However, they aspire to improve their world in which they are most comfortable, rather than leave for more significant cultural or social capital. Some of the participants in the study were not interested in working in prestigious banking corporations in New York; becoming a high-profile trial lawyer in Los Angeles or live in Washington DC as an elected politician. They wanted a job that will support them and their future families. Also, they

do not plan to move far from home because they wanted to support their families and contribute to the communities in which they were raised. (p. 116)

Yosso contends that the source of this resistance capital comes from parents, community members and some historical experiences like the civil rights movement, which required collective action for the attainment of equal opportunities in society and various social justice issues. According to the author, resistance capital also equips students from marginalized communities to confront the multiple situations of systemic, societal, and institutional inequalities.

Community Cultural Wealth and Hustle

Yosso's model acknowledges challenges students face, questions institutional barriers, and characterizes student assets. CCW also offers a communally informed, asset-based understanding of the various forms of capital that students from marginalized backgrounds may possess. The CCW model also provides a counter view to the traditional deficit capital perspective used to examine and understand FGLISs' success as individuals and the communities to which they belong. Student success, aspiration, and efforts to achieve are not solely dependent on the student but seen as a collective and shared aspiration with various members of the community playing a significant role to ensure success.

CCW is similar to communal cultural behaviors in sub-Saharan Africa, where raising a child is a cooperative collective effort and not solely the responsibility of the parents of the child. Lloyd & Blanc (1996), for instance, noted that "extended family networks in sub-Saharan Africa enable children with an academic promise to move to households of 'patron' family members, who help them gain access to higher quality schools" (as cited in Buchmann & Hannum, 2001). Yosso's CCW model will serve as a useful model to understand the various ways FGLISs embody their

past experiences and how they may have used some of these capitals to develop their capacity to *hustle*, possibly transferring the concept to the academic environment.

CCW, however, is deeply rooted in the experiences of marginalized students in higher education institutions in the U.S. There exists little to no literature that utilizes Yosso's model to understand the experiences of FGLISs and other diverse marginalized student populations at different higher educational institutions in regions outside the US. Not much is known about how these experiences may vary for similar students in non-western contexts like in sub-Saharan Africa.

Additionally, CCW does not explain how higher education institutions may operationalize these forms of capital to assist FGLISs to succeed. I will, therefore, use this model as a preliminary framework to identify the sorts of capital FGLISs from across sub-Saharan Africa have and which they bring with them to the academy. At the same time, CCW may not be sufficient for answering the overarching research question because it only identifies the wealth of resources and various forms of capital without explaining the process of operationalizing this asset-model towards their academic success. Therefore, this study will also be informed by other asset-focused frameworks.

In addition to the CCW framework I will also explore Baxton Magolda's (1999) Self-authorship Theory which is described as "an ability [for a student] to construct knowledge in a contextual world, an ability to construct an internal identity separate from external influences and an ability to engage in relationship without losing one's internal identity" (p. 12).

Self -Authorship Theory and Hustling

Kegan (1994) first developed the concept of Self-authorship in a theory he called *Evolution of Consciousness,* which explained the overlapping nature of an individual's cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development. According to Evans et al. (2010), Kegan's evolution of consciousness represented a "personal unfolding of ways of organizing experiences that are not just replaced as we grow but subsumed into more complex systems of mind" (p. 178). Thus, FGLISs may subsume their new context with their prior socialization, experiences, and way of being before arriving at the academy.

Many ambiguities and tensions mark this process, and there are moments of instability as their identities are challenged both in and out of the classroom. Although this process is typical for many college students, it may particularly heighten for FGLISs because of the various ways they are categorized and conceptualized (as discussed in the previous sections in this paper). Additionally, Jahangir, Rhiannon, and Pete (2011) contend that the lived experiences of FGLISs are "unlikely to be reflected in the curriculum" (p. 57), which may further lead them to feel like strangers in the academy. This feeling of marginalization forces FGLISs to self-author their own identities and determine how they relate to others in the academic community (Abes & Jones, 2004; Baxter Magolda, 2014).

Baxter Magolda (2001, 2007) further developed the theory of self-authorship in the higher education context through her work with white students in a Midwestern university to gain more in-depth knowledge into the intersecting nature of the three most essential features of self-authorship: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. To understand this intersection of the individual's identity, she asked the questions: *How do I know (cognitive)? Who Am I (intrapersonal)? How do I want to construct relationships with others (interpersonal)?* These

questions would be explored through the narratives of the participants in this study and matched with how they are perceived by the institutions and their various scholarship programs to understand some of the multiple identities they navigate and how they make meaning for themselves while engaging with these multiple external labeling of their identities.

According to Baxter Magolda (2001) there are four phases of self-authorship: 1) external formulas; 2) crossroads; 3) becoming an author of one's own life; 4) internal formulas. These four phases are summarized in *Figure 3* below:

	Following Formulas	Crossroads	Becoming the Author of One's life	Internal Foundation
Epistemological dimension: how do I know	Believe authority's plans; how "you" know	Question plans; see need for own vision	Choose own beliefs; how "I" know in context of external knowledge claims	Grounded in internal belief system
Intrapersonal dimension: who am I?	Define self through external others	Realize dilemma of external definition; see need for internal identity	Choose own values, identity in context of external forces	Grounded in internal coherent sense of self
Interpersonal dimension: what relationships do I want with others?	Act in relationships to acquire approval	Realize delemma of focusing on external approval; see need to bring self to relationship	Act in relationships to be true to self, mutually negotating how needs are met	Grounded in mutality

Figure 3: Four Phases of the Journey Towards Self-Authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p.40).

Phase 1: Following Formulas

In this phase, Evans (2010) noted that the youth allow others to define who they are. "Young adults follow the plans laid out for them" while assuring themselves they created these plans themselves (p. 185). Baxter Magolda (2004) further adds that at this phase, students mainly depend on external authorities to frame their identities. In the case of the FGLISs, they follow the institutional codes of engaging with them through their various identifiers such as "Low-Income Students," "Low persisting students," "Low college attaining students," "Students having no

cultural and social capital." At this stage institutions may engage with FGLISs in several efforts to assimilate them into the various "acceptable" academic norms and values which may not match with their experiences, hence challenging them to unlearn their familiar values and skills which they have previously used to survive and succeed in their previous academic paths (see Rendon, 1994). This phase begins the questioning of their identity and who they are as individuals, moving them to the second phase.

Phase 2: Crossroads

At this phase, Baxter Magolda (2001) alludes that individuals begin to look inward for affirmation of who they are and not at the external authorities which define them. Evans (2010) describes this stage as one where the plans a student has been following do not necessarily fit anymore, and new methods need to be established. In the case of FGLISs, they become dissatisfied with the external categories imposed on them by the external authorities in the academy and begin to question and confront the mismatch. FGLISs are likely to *hustle* at the Crossroads phases resulting in them drawing from their internally developed cultural wealth from their communities and the various skills and life experiences acquired through their previous educational and non-academic paths in which they *hustled* to help them navigate the process of confusion and self-questioning. According to Baxter Magolda (2001), this stage is influenced by the context, the individual's life experiences, and the various help available to help them in a sense-making process.

Phase 3: Becoming the Author of One's Life

At this phase, Baxter Magolda (2001) contends that individuals realize that they could decide for themselves what identities to go by and resolve to stick by who they believe they are

whether the external authorities accept these identities or not. Evans et al. (2010) further assert that the ability to choose one's own beliefs and to stand by them (especially when facing conflict or opposing views) is central at this stage. This study desires to understand the identities FGLISs construct for themselves at this phase, and how they negotiate these identities within the academy towards achieving their academic goals.

Phase 4: Internal Foundation

The final phase, according to Baxter Magolda, is a grounding of the third phase where individuals gain mastery of their belief systems and values and use that to relate to their external relationships. Individuals at this phase make decisions and choices which matches with their internally grounded beliefs and values. They also develop relationships in congruence to these core values and belief systems (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Evans (2010) noted that this phase is "grounded in their self-determined belief system, in their sense of who they are, and the mutuality of their relationships" (p. 186). At this stage, the student does not adhere to externally ascribed descriptors but defines their descriptors to guide their external interactions.

In sum, the process of self- authorship is triggered by situations where individuals need to make decisions with no guided formula to follow and are additionally dissatisfied by their present condition (Baxter Magolda, 2001). It is not a linear process, but dependent on the context the individual finds themselves in and their life experiences. Self-authorship, therefore, offers an excellent theoretical framework which can explain the process in which FGLISs conceptualize and enact *hustle* using their CCW as framed by Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model and to attain academic success.

Self-authorship theory and CCW, unfortunately, lack the diversity of the participants and contexts which have been researched. Therefore, little is known about how these concepts are

nuanced in other populations outside the educational environment in Western countries, raising the need for more empirical work done in this area. In the ensuing sections, I will outline literature focusing on higher education access for FGLISs in sub-Saharan Africa and highlight some of the interventions used to improve access for FGLISs to situate the study in the context of sub-Saharan Africa.

Initial Conceptualization of Hustle

The concept of *hustle* has not been widely researched and has been used cautiously in some literature to represent the phenomenon of struggling to survive by having a portfolio of mechanisms, strategies, and ways of utilizing limited resources to *get by* (Gowan, 2010; Spence, 2015; Thieme, 2013). The term is mainly used in the informal sector to conceptualize how people living in various vulnerable conditions in ghettos, slums and on the streets, get by daily (Gowan, 2010; Thieme, 2013). For instance, in Nairobi, "the *'hustle'* has become integral to the 'creolized argot' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2005) of youth living and working in slums and this expression epitomizes the under-documented and complex social fabric and everyday logic of 'life in the ghetto" (Thieme, 2013, p. 229). The few studies that have attempted to define hustling in the African context have done so in the informal sector where the youth engage in multiple ventures and alternative forms of work (mostly menial) as a means of generating their daily livelihoods.

Thieme (2013) noted that "the term hustle is an expression of capitalist relations but formed and exercised in ways that defy central assumptions of capitalism related to particular pursuits of profit, growth and 'rational' economic decision making" (p. 230). Thus, hustling in the context of the African Youth does not represent one solid investment that is grown over time for profitable

returns but as a means of engaging in many efforts that contribute to one's daily survival during scarcity and uncertainty of one's central source of income.

Thieme further asserts that hustling, or making a living, for the youth in Mathare, Kenya, included a portfolio of income-generating activities and livelihood strategies which were entangled with everyday practices of "hanging out" and moments of "waithood," a term used by some scholars to describe differed aspiration from the period of youth to adulthood (Dhillon& Yousef, 2007; Honwana, 2012; Jones, 2012; Mabala, 2011; Weiss 2009 as cited by Thieme, 2013). During this period, youths are not sure of the outcomes of their daily struggles to get by. *Hustling*, then, connotes vulnerability and uncertainty of continuity and extreme disadvantage, but also involves a set of strategies and "know how" adapted from one's life experiences, social connections, and tenacity to push through and persist amidst struggle and uncertainty. Thieme identified that:

> Husting challenged dominant understanding of precarity and working uncertainties, not through new categorization and "ontology-building' (Gibson-Graham, 2003, pg. 35), but rather through the reclaiming of a familiar-seemingly prosaic, certainly loaded- vocabulary. "The Hustle" is advanced as a collective condition of individual insecurity disproportionately distributed amongst young people navigating uncertainty in irregular employment through prolonged state of "waithood." (Thieme, 2017, pg. 530).

The attributes of *hustle* noted above are characteristics common amongst many vulnerable youth populations in sub-Saharan Africa, including youth from impoverished and low-income communities. When the youth get the opportunity of a sponsored education, they are likely to use these prior skills of *hustle* to continue to thrive in the academy. Embedded in the broader research posed is a possibility that *hustle* is partially constructed through cultural signals of combining

multiple strategies acquired over time through the lived subjective experiences of FGLISs, their proven academic achievements, and the cultural "wealth" from their communities which they use to self-author and engage in their new academic environment to succeed.

Grit, Resilience, Hardiness, Hope and the Capacity to Hustle

The last decade has seen a host of several theories and approaches rooted in positive social psychology which seek to understand student persistence in the face of adversity and their motivation not to give up (Strayhorn, 2016). Notable amongst these theories are the concept of grit, resilience, hardiness, persistence, perseverance, and hope (Banyard &Cantor, 2004; Duckworth et al., 2011; Brooks & Goldstein, 2002; Maddi et al., 2013). Strayhorn argues that a sole focus on just psychological traits may fall into the conventional pathological narrative of lack and deficit. Thus people either having or not having Positive Social Psychology does not pay attention to the individual in isolation but draws on how the society and the environment in which the individual occupies and the positivity with which the individual accesses his or her situation can potentially influence the outcome (Strayhorn, 2016).

Positive Social Psychology thus draws from multiple disciplines that offers an understanding of how individuals' outcomes can be explained in a scientific, and measurable way and provide understanding on how individuals when faced with extreme adversity develop protective factors to reduce and eliminate stress (Strayhorn, 2016). For example, Duckworth et al.'s (2011) extensive work on grit explains an individual's persistent and sustained passionate pursuit of a long-term goal in the face of multiple failures. While Wang & Gordon (1994) define resilience as the "success in school despite personal vulnerabilities adversities brought about by early and ongoing environmental conditions and experiences" (p.38). Hardiness is defined as "a

pattern of attitudes, that helps to turn stressful circumstance from a potential disaster into growth opportunities" (Maddi et al., 2013, p.128). Strayhorn (2016) defines hope as "the perceived ability to conceptualize one's goals and derive paths to achieve them" (p.117). The above-listed concepts and theories provide multiple explanations on the various propelling factors that compel individuals to set a goal and work towards achieving the goals, especially in the face of adversities.

While many of them have been used to explain the persistence of FGLIS over the years, many of these concepts heavily center the efforts of the individuals and their ability to thrive as opposed to the collective and intentional communal efforts that go into the positive outcomes FGLISs experience throughout their educational trajectories. Focusing only on the above-listed theories may potentially follow the same pattern of ignoring the structural contribution to what makes the individual struggle in the first place hence concentrate solely on the individual as the focal point of any remediating intervention (Swartz and Soudien, 2015). Moreover, many of the current research on concepts like grit and resilience lack diversity in terms of the geographical context and the participants and are heavily focused on populations in the Global North. There is, therefore, the shortage in the literature on how some of these concepts play out in the educational experiences of other categories of youth for instance youths who do not only come from adversity but are also first in their families to attain a college degree which focuses results in their double disadvantage.

Finally, while literature is abundant on many positive psychological theories, their application tends to be done individually and not collectively. For instance, does it go without saying that the presence of one will naturally mean others are naturally present? Can one possess and embody resilience, hope, grit, hardiness, and persistence at the same time? Does one attribute

foretell the other? Are these concepts intertwined and interrelated in any way? Are there other culturally nuanced theories similar to what has already been researched that can add to how specific populations experiences persistence differently? FGLISs' capacity to *hustle* holds a lot of promise to answer some of the questions I have raised above as it is a complex and locally conceptualized by the particular group who is using it specifically in a navigational capacity.

Chapter Summary

The educational trajectories of FGLISs consist of various unique and complex experiences. Because the experiences of FGLISs are sometimes non-standard, they are often thought to be deficient in the current literature. This review of the literature has pointed out the many ways FGLISs are portrayed as being incapable of achieving academic success but have also pointed out the various ways such deficit conceptualizations neglect to equally examine the broader institutional and structural conditions which contribute to their continuous vulnerability.

Furthermore, the cultural context of strategies used by FGLISs to survive before their postsecondary educational experience may significantly influence the way they continue to thrive in the academy and could be relevant to understanding how FGLISs from sub-Saharan Africa obtain their educational success. Little is known in the literature on how these pre-survival strategies and culturally coded capacities possessed by these students interact and interrelate in different ways with the more formalized institutionally set structures, systems, programs, and policies to contribute to student success.

The formal and well-documented mostly asset-based concepts discussed in this review provides a useful framework to understand an informal and culturally embedded concept of academic persistence and mastery, which FGLISs from many sub-Saharan African countries may be using to succeed throughout their educational trajectories which are culminating in their college success. This understanding is essential because it stands a good chance of helping higher

education institutions to understand better what is still lacking in the literature when studying FGLISs to encourage more research aimed at supporting them to succeed.

As alluded by Sara Goldrick-Rab (2016), "by helping people from low-income families move up the economic ladder via college attainment, we significantly reduce the likelihood they will need social welfare programs in the future" (p. 235). A college degree today is not a privilege but necessary to participate in the economic and social mobility of the individuals and their families. Not having a college degree today "systemically locks individuals out of nearly every decent-paying job opportunity, very safe neighborhood, and every opportunity to create safe future for young children" (Goldrick-Rab, 2016, p. 238). It is, therefore, critical that FGLISs, who primarily suffer from various forms of poverty (see Beegle, 2003) and exclusion, succeed and attain the needed skills to participate and improve their life chances. Chapter Three will discuss the methodology and execution plan for this study.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

AKOMA - The heart

Symbol of patience and tolerance

"For people who work with students like me, look out for people like us and don't mix us up with everyone else because our experiences are different (Efua, Interview, 11/25/17)

Introduction to Research Design

This study explored the subjective educational experiences of first-generation college students (students whose parents do not have postsecondary education and are the first in their families to go to college) who are also from low-income backgrounds in an African University. The study sort to ascertain how their capacity to *hustle* contributed to their educational success leading to the attainment of an undergraduate degree. The aim is to understand how the participants use their capacity to *hustle,* a culturally nuanced performance of multiple navigational capacities to attain academic success. The study used a qualitative approach and a narrative inquiry methodology to highlight the lived experiences meaningful to the participant which contribute to their educational progress and which may help to explain the capacity of the participants to *hustle*.

This chapter discusses the set of procedures used in answering the research questions. I begin with a restatement of the research questions guiding the study and a discussion of what I sought to achieve with each research question. I then continue with a description of the underlying research paradigm for the study – a qualitative research methodology, specifically, the narrative inquiry. Subsequently, I provide a detailed description of the research methods I used, the type of instruments I employed to collect the data for the study. I then give a description of the research

setting and the participants of the study; which will be followed by the data collection methods I used and the timeline for the study. I also discuss my data analysis process and conclude the chapter with an establishment of the ethical and validity considerations, the delimitations of the research, and a chapter summary.

This qualitative narrative inquiry takes on an asset-based understanding of the educational experiences of FGLISs culminating into their college success. The study investigates how such students use "*hustle*," a culturally nuanced navigational capacity characterized by multiple survival and persistence tactics to succeed when conditions for success and survival are uncertain and challenging because of lack of resources to determine and support clear educational pathways.

This particular capacity possessed and used by some FGLISs in sub-Saharan Africa is worth investigating because, despite the fact that the participants in the study are on a full financial aid program aimed at removing the conditions causing them to struggle (by assumption financial constraints) in order to succeed, participants in the study still maintain that they were compelled to *hustle* throughout their postsecondary education and attribute their educational success to this navigational capacity. Furthermore, while hustle has not been extensively researched primarily in the academic context, there is literature which suggests that hustle is an economic practice in the informal sector. Thieme (2013), for instance, describes "the hustle" as a" constant pragmatic search for the alternative structure of opportunity outside formal education, employment, and service provision." (p.g Thieme's description of *hustle* suggests that the process occurs outside the educational setting; hence, the participants in this study used to *hustle* to explain their formal educational experiences. To this end, this study seeks to answer the over-arching question: ***In what ways do first-generation low-income students conceptualize and use their capacity to hustle throughout their educational experiences to achieve success in an African University?***

The following questions will help answer this overarching question:

1) What does *hustle* mean to first-generation low-income students who have led a life filled with various forms of adversities but who have gained access to an African university through their capacity to *hustle*?

2) What are the lived experiences of the participants' performance of *hustle* throughout their educational trajectories from as far back as they could remember as they reflect upon and recall in their senior year in college?

3) In what ways do the participants articulate their college success, what unique characteristics contributed to their *hustling* dispositions, and how do they associate their college success to their capacity to *hustle*?

The first question examined how FGLISs conceptualize their capacity to *"hustle"* in the educational context. This question mainly sought to illuminate the specific ways participants described *hustle* and the various rationales behind their descriptions to understand how it differs, if at all, from traditional concepts like grit, resilience and other social psychological concepts (which are well established and researched theories and concepts in the higher education literature as presented in chapter two). The first question would also examine the cultural nuances associated with the conceptualization of *"hustling"* and identify how participants construct and make meaning of the concept about their educational experiences.

In the second question, I sought to understand the institutional and personal conditions which trigger FGLISs' *"hustle"* about their educational experiences as they recall in their senior year of college. The second question mainly aims at identifying the various ways through which FGLISs respond to the conditions which prompt them to *hustle* by

operationalizing *hustle* as a survival and persistence strategy in and out of the classroom. I seek to identify what experiences and strategies the participants identified as "*hustling*" (the performance of hustle), how these strategies support their educational achievements and determine the source (s) of these strategies.

The third question would focus on the participants' attribution of their postsecondary educational achievements and success to *"hustle"* and why they perceived that *"hustling"* contributed to their success. This third question would seek to understand the unique characteristics the participants exhibited that enabled them to *hustle,* which they believe had significant influences on their educational trajectories. The third question would also seek to understand how participants define success beyond the institutional set standards (e.g., Grade Point Average, etc.).

Qualitative Research Approach

Creswell (2009) asserts that qualitative research is used in "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human phenomenon" (p. 4). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) further explain that "the word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency" (p. 10). I chose to conduct this study using a qualitative research approach because the nature of the lived experiences of the participants expressed through their personal stories were difficult, if not impossible, to quantify.

Furthermore, I was interested in how the participants constructed their success, how they interpreted their experiences, and the meanings they associated with those experiences (Merriam, 2009). I was also interested in understanding how FGLISs were making sense of their postsecondary educational success and how they constructed and used the word *hustle (*the

condition and action), the hustler (as the identity they take on and embody) and hustling (as their performance of *hustle*), which is not common in the academic setting, to describe their experience in their educational environment.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) contend that qualitative research designs "seek to unearth and understand the meaning. Moreover, they are after social meaning from the perspectives of research participants who are enmeshed in their context" (p. 12). This unique attribute of meaning-making linked to the context of the participants further strengthens the ability of this approach to unearthing the exclusive conceptualization, enactment, and perceptions the participants are attributing to "hustling" in the context of their educational experience. Merriam (2009) additionally lists the following as essential characteristics of qualitative research: "the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning: the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive, and the product is richly descriptive" (p. 14). These attributes of the qualitative research methodology enabled me to understand the process, strategies better, and specific descriptions FGLISs used to narrate their educational success. Furthermore, a qualitative methodology allowed me to comprehend the unique geographical context and higher educational setting of the participants which was a primary objective of this study given the geographic dearth in the literature on the postsecondary experiences of FGLISs from sub-Saharan Africa.

Narrative Inquiry Approach

The particular type of qualitative methodology I employed in this research was a narrative inquiry. Schwandt (2007) defines narrative inquiry as "a broad term encompassing the interdisciplinary study of the activities involved in generating and analyzing stories of life experiences and reporting that kind of research" (p. 203-204). Merriam (2009) explains that

"stories are how we make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us" (Merriam, p. 32). Narrative inquiry focuses on the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story to construct a better understanding of the lives of the individuals as it is shaped by their built upon experiences (Patton, 2002).

Additionally, Creswell (2009) describes narrative inquiry as a "strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives" (p. 13). This study focused on the lived experiences of 17 FGLISs and their practices with (and constructions of) *hustling*. The study encompasses their identities, their specific linguistic use of the concept, their unique and nuanced contextual association, and the various ways they enacted their capacity to *hustle,* which was captured through their personal stories.

Clandinin (2013) asserted that narrative inquiry honors lived experiences as an essential source of knowledge. I used narrative inquiry to center and honor the life experiences of the participants who are attaining educational success and offer them the opportunity to tell their stories from their perspectives, interpretations, and meanings. This source of knowledge, which highlights their success stories, is particularly significant given how their postsecondary educational experiences are sometimes portrayed in a discourse of deficits, lack(ing), and inadequacy (Smith, 1999; Yosso, 2005). This study takes an explicitly appreciative (asset-based) approach, building on Smith's (1999) approach to honoring the stories, experiences, and successes of marginalized groups. Such an approach accentuates students' ability to survive hardships and challenges instead of the continuous portrayal of their failures and pathologizing them as being the problem.

A unique feature of narrative inquiry, which makes it appropriate for this study, is the use of the first-person account of participants' experiences as told in the form of a story (Merriam,

2009). This approach allows participants to use specific language, culturally significant terms, and contextual nuances (unique participants) to tell their story. According to Smith, this approach enables the 'namer' to retain as much control of the meaning as possible. She asserts that by 'naming the world' people name their realities by using language and indigenous concepts which cannot be replaced by another language (Smith, 1999). *Hustle* has multiple connotations and meanings across the world and can, therefore, not be assumed to have the same meaning. It was, therefore, vital for me to use a methodology which allowed the participants to describe, name, interpret, and construct *hustle* in ways that reflected their lived experiences and cultural nuances. A narrative inquiry approach, thus, offered the participant the opportunity in ways that other qualitative approaches could not.

Moreover, in a narrative inquiry, the stories of the participants are treated as data, which is retold by the researcher into a narrative which includes the researcher's life experiences about the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2009). Thus, a narrative inquiry approach requires the researcher and participants to co-construct the stories of the participants into narratives. Patton (2015) further elaborates on the nature of what the story and narrative represents in a narrative inquiry by asserting that a narrative inquiry is more than just storytelling for its own sake but involves the researcher treating the story as data and the narrative as analysis, which involves interpreting the story, placing it in context, and comparing it with other stories. Patton (2015) also explains that the story represents what happened, and the narrative is how the telling of what happened is structured and scripted within some context for some purpose (p. 128). The various attributes of a narrative inquiry approach and qualitative methodology, therefore, offered a rich methodological approach to understand the ways FGLISs are conceptualizing their capacity to

hustle, how they enacted *hustle* and the various meanings they are attributing to *hustle* as a contributor to their academic success.

Researcher Positionality Statement and Ethical Consideration

In a narrative inquiry, the stories of the participants are treated as data which is retold by the researcher into a narrative which includes the investigator's life experiences about the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2009). It is, therefore, important to acknowledge my positionality going into this research and how my experiences and relationship with the participants and institution may influence my interpretation of the phenomenon being studied.

I identify as a first-generation student from a low-income family. My entire educational path before college was encumbered with many checked experiences which disrupted my educational path upon the demise of my father. I have, however, been very successful academically and have always received mentorship and financial assistance from family members who admired my academic achievements. I, however, secured a government scholarship for my university education upon graduating amongst the top ten students from my high school in the national college entrance exams. In 2010, I received a Ford Foundation International Fellowship Award to pursue my master's degree through which I came into contact with the university under study, where I currently work in a senior management position.

I was part of the first team which implemented many of the scholarship programs through the multiple responsibilities I executed, including serving on the recruitment and selection committee and the design and implementation of most of the support interventions to help financial aid students to adapt to the new academic environment. I also served as the institutional lead administrator for diversity and inclusion. In that role, my work involved resolving issues about

campus climate, many of which centered around the feeling of isolation and marginalization among the low-income student population. I took time off in 2015 to pursue my Ph.D., which was heavily influenced by my yearning to have a better theoretical and scholarly understanding of the educational experiences of first-generation low-income college students.

I was invited by the university in the summer of 2016 to conduct an institutional exit and re-entry training for a cohort of one of the scholarship programs graduating that year. One of the significant institutional learning from that training pointed to the fact that the scholarship recipients were very grateful to have benefited from the financial support. Many of them acknowledged their lives, and future opportunities had been significantly improved. However, some of them also reported that they experienced significant isolation and marginalization, which they attributed to their socioeconomic disadvantage. Those who reported feeling excluded also claimed their separation adversely affected their wellbeing and sense of membership in the academic community.

The outcome of this training coupled with the various individual conversations I had with some of the students was what sparked my interest to investigate further the different experiences FGLISs went through to succeed. I am therefore approaching this research as an insider, and not an outsider, who has personal experiences with the phenomenon of *hustle* through my own lived experiences as a first-generation and low-income student with a similar educational path as most of the participants who participated in this study. I went into this research with my experiences of being a high academic achiever who was from a financially disadvantaged background and a scholarship recipient with important knowledge to an administrator of similar scholarships. Finally, I am approaching this study with a deep professional connection with the institution and the participants involved.

I am therefore choosing to approach this study as an African higher education scholar and practitioner, with lived experiences growing up as a first-generation low-income student and an important understanding of the research participants, academic institution, and the research topic. I believe that with the practice of careful self- reflexivity, this positionality would enhance my understanding and interpretation of the experiences of the participants and the academic context being studied. I used multiple strategies to create spaces for the participants to tell their own stories and use my positionality to co-create the narrative with them through the data analysis process. I also relied heavily on expert scholars and researchers who have used storytelling and narratives as a research methodology to check any potential biases that emerged because of my positionality, to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of this study.

Research Methods

Description of Participants and Selection Techniques

According to Maxwell (2013), purposeful sampling is a strategy in which "particular setting, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your research question and goals and that cannot be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 97). I applied a purposeful sampling technique to help me choose the most knowledgeable participants for this study. I used this technique especially because although *hustling* is a known terminology used in the informal employment sector to describe how young people living in adversity "*get by"* and "*get through"* the daily uncertainties of work (Thieme, 2017), the term is not common among youth educational experiences and is being used by the specific individuals in specific ways which are unique to them. Furthermore, Patton (2015) adds that purposeful sampling allows selecting "*information-rich cases"* with in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon being studied (p. 264).

I first engaged with the administrative staff who worked directly with the scholarship program in which the participants were enrolled in to help me identify those whose life experiences reflect the phenomenon under study and who would be suitable for this study. Stanton-Salazar (2011) defines institutional agents as "high-status, non-kin, agents who occupy relatively high positions in the multiple dimensional stratification systems, and who are well positioned to provide critical forms of social and institutional support" (p. 1066). In the context of this study, institutional agents consisted of faculty, administrators, and fellow students in various positions of power who had a direct influence on the academic curriculum as well as co-curriculum activities of the university. These institutional agents had engaged with the students in different capacities and knew the participants personally. They were familiar with their life stories and their educational trajectories and were in an excellent position to suggest which pool of students were most suited for this study.

Once I secured the names and contacts of the students, I sent them an email invitation to explain my study and invited them to participate and contribute their rich experiences to help provide a deeper understanding of *hustling* in the academic context. Engaging the institutional agents in the selection of the participants allowed me to gain their buy-in and offered me the opportunity to ensure that I connected with participants who were suitable for the study.

Because this study sought to understand a specific phenomenon of how *hustling* is conceptualized and enacted in the academic setting as well as the particular ways FGLISs were attributing the phenomenon to their educational success, it was necessary to select participants who were engaged in this phenomenon, hence, my decision to use a purposeful sampling technique.

The participants in this study were students who identified as being the first in their immediate families to go to college in addition to their parents not having a postsecondary degree.

Participants were also on financial support for their college education and had demonstrated academic success by the university's Students Handbook with a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.00/4.00 or better and with no record of academic or social misconduct (also described by the university as "being in good standing"). For this study, only participants in good academic standing as determined by the university were included in the study. To also ensure that the participants had demonstrated academic success over time and had a good understanding of and longer experiences at the university, students currently in the senior year were included in the study.

Sample Size

Merriam (2009) suggests that the number of participants to include in a study depends on the "questions being asked, the data being gathered, the analysis in progress, and the resources you have to support the project" (p. 80). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the use of 'the point of saturation test' to guide the size of the sample, that is sampling until no new information emerges. Patton (2002), on the other hand, recommends a minimum sample size "based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study" (p. 246). Due to the specific criterion for the participants in this study, the sample size was greatly determined by the number of responses I obtained from the invitation to participants who fit the requirements.

I received an initial response from 24 students who expressed interest in participating in the study. After the initial analysis of the questionnaire that went with the invitation email, seven students did not meet the study criteria for various reasons. Three were not the first in their families to go to college, and the four were full feepaying students who had experienced significant financial privilege throughout their educational trajectories. I finally selected 17 students who fit the criteria of being first-generation, with a clear demonstration of financial disadvantage, who

were in their senior year, were in good academic standing and were on track to graduate from college.

Data Collection

Because this study used a narrative inquiry methodology, my primary source of data was the stories of the educational experiences of the participants. These stories were collected from multiple in-depth life-stories interviews to ensure a holistic coverage of the experiences of the participants about how they were constructing and enacting hustling both in and out of the classroom. I used life stories narrative interviews that sought detailed stories and narratives of the participants' experiences from as far back as they remembered culmination into their senior year in college rather than brief stories of just their present conditions with *hustling* (Atkinson, 1998; Riessman, 2008).

This approach and span of data included were significant because I wanted to understand the participants' full educational trajectories and not just their college experiences to understand unique patterns and strategies, they were bringing with them to the academy. To do this, I used semi-structured open-ended interviews (Merriam, 2009). Simply put, interviews are a way of finding out what is "in and on someone else's mind" (Patton, 2002, p. 341) and are used when the information, behavior or ways in which participants interpret their world cannot be obtained by just observing (Merriam, 2009).

Additionally, DeMarrais (2004) defines interviews as "a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (p.55). Specifically, I employed a life-stories interview, which is more open-ended and less structured and therefore enabled the participants to define their world and their experiences with *hustling* in their unique ways. This structure of interviewing also allowed me to collectively explore the interview questions in a more conversational approach to be able to elicit follow-ups clarifying answers to the questions. I, however, had a set of guiding questions I used flexibly as follow-ups to the

responses from the participants. Additionally, I conducted several follow-up conversations to clarify and further discuss what emerged from the first interview and any additional questions not answered in the first interview. In all, the data collection lasted throughout the senior year of the participants from August 2017 to May 2018. Below is the outline of the timeline for collecting and analyzing data for this study.

Figure 4: Data Collection and Analysis Timeline

Data Analysis

Schwandt (2007) defines the narrative analysis as "a variety of procedures for interpreting the narratives or stories generated in research" (p. 202). As earlier alluded by Patton (2015), in a narrative inquiry, the stories represent the data and the narrative the analysis. This process requires a careful interpretation on the part of the researcher to identify the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story to tease out relevant information on the phenomenon being studied and how it can be woven together within individual stories and across the pool of stories collected. The data analysis process was highly inductive and comparative (Merriam, 2009), taking into consideration what was happening within and across the various narratives presented by the participants. Reissman (2008) cautions against the narrow coding of stories into bits and pieces, emphasizing that the contextual and structural elements of the story could be lost. Instead, high-quality data should consist of detailed and lengthy accounts with many different themes. I use this approach by using multiple direct quotes, descriptions, and explanations from the participant's stories in chapter five to present the cross-thematic findings.

As a researcher in this study, my role was to retell the stories of the participants both individually and collectively, which represents the phenomenon of hustling holistically, and the participants' conceptualizations, interpretations, and enactment throughout their educational trajectories. I used a third-party transcriber to professionally transcribe all the electronically recorded interviews and engaged in inductive, open, and thematic coding immediately after each round of interviews using field notes and journal entries to develop thematic narrative analysis as described by Riessman (2012). I will present a detailed account of the process in chapter five.

Ethical Consideration

According to Merriam (2009), the validity and reliability of a study are to a large extent dependent on the ethics of the investigation hence I undertook the following ethical procedures to ensure that this study was credible. I applied for ethical clearance through the University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedure and the IRB's requirement of the research site to ensure that the required ethical procedures were followed.

Because the study participants were all above 18 years, and the study did not pose any significant risks to the participants, I applied for an expedited review under category seven. I, however, received an exemption from the University of Minnesota's IRB and also received clearance from the University I used for this study. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary, and participants were also allowed to withdraw at any point in time during the study without any penalty if they felt the need to do so. Additionally, I offered participants with a gift certificate of $20 to be used at the university's bookstore as an incentive for their participation.

All participants were made to review an informed consent form before arriving at the interview, which was reread to them before they signed before beginning the interview. The informed consent captured the details of the participants' freedom to participate and the details of the research to help them decide whether to partake in this research. The consent form would cover information that explained: their freedom of participation, confidentiality, and the potential benefits and risk of participating in the study.

Additionally, the interview transcripts were de-identified, coded, and stored in a password-protected computer file, which was only accessible to me. Given the nature of the research methodology used in this study, it was essential to maintain an additional

commitment of confidentiality because the research participants shared their life stories, some of which contain very sensitive information about their identities, culture, their families, and communities. I, therefore, involved the participants in a collaborative interpretation of the data to ensure that they were comfortable with what was included in their stories.

Validity

Maxwell (2013) defined validity as "the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation or interpretation" (p. 122). He further asserted that validity could simply refer to a thorough consideration of how the researcher could be wrong in the interpretation and analysis of the data and the entire research process. Merriam (2009) refers to the validity of research as the "extent to which research findings are credible" (p. 234). Merriam suggests that the validity of research can be enhanced by using triangulation, the process of using multiple sources to collect the data to ensure that the immerging themes are consistent irrespective of the method used. It involves checking the interpretations of the data with the individuals interviewed, remaining in the research site over a period, member checking with expert peers on the emerging themes to correct for biases and seeking clarifications.

I applied multiple sessions of member checking of the participants at various points of the construction of the participant's narratives. I also ensured triangulation of the data by using the stories alongside verifying the emerging themes with some of the institutional agents who worked with the students directly and were familiar with their experiences through the admissions process and from their daily engagements and interactions with the participants. I also spoke with several scholars on the continent who were familiar with the concept of

hustling through the process of member checking, as recommended by Merriam (2009) and Patton (2015).

Additionally, I went into this study fully aware of my positionality. Although I was fully part of the process, I regularly engaged in reflective practice throughout the study by checking the various ways in which my subjective interpretations could potentially influence the outcome of the study by ensuring that was representative of the experiences of the participants I work with. I did so by continually running my interpretations and understanding of participant's experiences by them, especially when I was not sure about the specific meanings.

Limitations

This study purposefully selected the participants to ensure that the rich narratives and lived experiences of students who experience hustle were accounted for by the students themselves. To Patton (2015), purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select "information-rich cases for in-depth study" (p. 264). Also, Maxwell (2013) notes that purposeful sampling allows for the "most productive relationships" (p. 92) and is not merely a sampling of convenience. This method of participant selection, however, automatically eliminates a significant percentage of FGLIS population whose insights might also provide a broader representation of this study.

Additionally, because of the qualitative nature of this study and its unique institutional context, the generalizability of this study will be limited to FGLISs with a similar student and institutional profile (which is quite rare around the world). However, the purpose of this research is not to generalize the phenomenon in all African institutions and the experiences of FGLISs in Africa. Instead, the study aims to provide an understanding of how FGLISs construct *hustling*, describe how they enact it through their daily educational experiences and highlight their

perception of how hustling contributes to their educational attainment and success. This study focuses on FGLISs in one African institution of higher education; it is a distinct but not necessarily a unique institution.

Furthermore, my relationship with the University as a senior administrator who works with participants of this study might question my objectivity. However, as previously stated in my positionality with this study, I would argue that my unique status (as a former FGLIS who was a scholarship recipient and now a senior administrator whose professional and scholarly work focuses on FGLISs) gives me an in-depth understanding of the context under study. This positionality strengthened the inferences that emerged from this research.

However, to enhance the validity of the study, I used multiple forms of data collection methods. I used in-depth one-on-one narrative interview to elicit well thought through responses from the research participant. I also intentionally developed the interview protocols to have open-ended questions to encourage real conversations in a more relaxed setting. Finally, I used what Ladson-Billings (1994) refers to as "collective interpretation" (p. 185) which compelled me to rather than simply gathering data and interpreting it on my own, I used the participants of the study as partners in the interpretation and analysis phases. This approach gave helped me to capture rich information and increase the reliability of the results of the study.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the execution plan for the study which sought to understand how FGLISs were conceptualizing, enacting, and associating the concept of "hustling" throughout their education experiences and how their capacity to hustle contributed to their educational success. The chapter first restated the critical issue being studied and outlined the overarching research question guiding the study as well as the three

specific research questions which are set to help answer the broad research question while stating my positionality as a researcher.

The chapter also laid out and discussed the research methodological approaches and design, which guided the study. This process included the choice and justification of using qualitative study and narrative inquiry, the proposal to use the various methods for participant selection, the sampling techniques employed and a discussion of the data collection method and the timeline for the study. I also presented the data analysis methods and the various ethical and validity considerations guiding the study. In the two chapters that follow—chapter four and five— I will present the findings of the study.

Chapter Four: Atypical Life-Stories of Three Focal Participants

DENKYEM – Crocodile

Symbol of adaptability. The crocodile lives in the water, yet breathes the air, demonstrating an ability to adapt to circumstances.

"Students with backgrounds like mine are adaptable. So whatever challenges you might put them in they easily adapt. They find a solution to it. People in authority may not trust their capabilities to do that because they do not understand them and their experiences."

(John, Interview, 11/24/17)

Introduction

Of extreme significance to this research is the intentional efforts I devoted to the various processes to ensure that the youths represented in this study had the final say at every point in the data collection and analyses processes. This chapter unexpectedly turned out to be the most challenging chapter to write. Throughout my field notes, I captured the detailed encounters I had with each of the participants and the various connections, emotions, and many familiar experiences I had come to establish with them. I began coding the transcribed narratives of each participant, but after coding the seventh transcript, I decided to abandon the coding process because I struggled to code Habiba's emotional distress in sharing her story of misfortune and tragedy as was the case of many of the participants in the study.

After reaching out to several scholars who have experience in the peculiar nature of this work and upon a thorough consultation with my adviser, I settled on focusing Chapter Four on a more detailed account of three participants to highlight the nuances that exist within the totality of the group, despite the commonalities and similarities they shared experiencing *hustle.* I share a broad thematic coding across the narratives of all 17 participants in Chapter Five. While the general

thematic analysis is both practically and theoretically useful, presenting the complete stories of three participants is particularly important and necessary to show their intersectionality as individuals and the different ways *hustle* presents itself in their individual lives.

"Hustle" Narratives of Three Focal Youth

The ensuing sections in this chapter provide an overview of the stories of three focal youths: Habiba, GMax, and Sophia. I begin with an introduction of each participant and present the various paths they followed to, which led to their college success. The narratives will highlight the critical elements of each participant's family background, educational trajectory, conceptualization and enactment of *hustle* and the contribution of "hustle" to success. An illustration of the participant's journey to success is mapped in Figure 5.

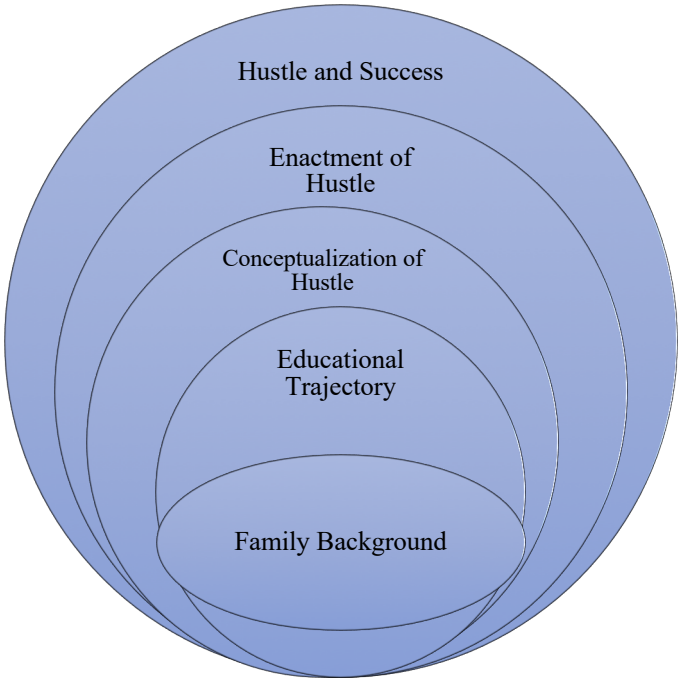
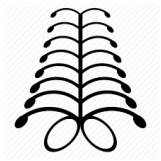


Figure 5: Pathway to attaining College Success

I collaboratively co-constructed the details of each participant's pathway to success with them from their extended narratives and multiple member-checking of their stories which they

edited, changed, clarified, and sometimes deleted each time I sent my constructed narratives from their accounts to them. This process was particularly important to ensure that the participants gained the privilege to have the final say in the process of co-constructing their narratives. Their stories emphasize the participants' experiences at various points in their educational trajectories and the demonstration of agency propelled by their motivation, attitude, skills, and personal dispositions they exhibited to manage the many challenges they faced before attaining success at the end of their graduation from college.

Habiba: Endurance, Resourcefulness, Hope, and Determination to Succeed



***AYA** – Fern*

The Fern is a symbol of endurance and resourcefulness. It is a hardy plant that can grow in difficult places. "An individual who wears this symbol suggests that (s) he has endured many adversities and outlasted much difficulty.

"Have a vision and be determined to work hard toward that vision no matter what it will take." (Habiba, Interview, 09/ 11/ 2017).

Habiba arrived at my house for our interview looking very enthusiastic and excited to share her stories on hustling. I was equally expectant to hear her story and was filled with numerous questions about how a *"kayayo"* (local name for people who carry loads at a paltry fee for shoppers at big local markets) could have come this far in life because my view of the many *kayaye* (plural) I've used at the market were people who were most of the time uneducated from the very most impoverished region of the country (Northern Region) and were very limited in language except their local language, let alone English. I knew that this was a different kind of *kayayo,* and I was determined to hear her story.

The first of three children, Habiba was born to illiterate parents who had migrated from the Northern part of Ghana, West Africa to Takoradi in the Central Region in search of better employment opportunities as a young couple when they got married. Her father worked as a *truck* (locally made manual cart for goods) pusher at the local market. With a lot of respect for her father, Habiba explained that although carting goods for a living was extremely tedious and barely paid enough to give them a comfortable life, her father believed in working hard to take care of them.

Her mother supported the family income with her skills for cooking by working as a cook in a *chop bar* (a local food joint) where she cooked many local dishes. Although uneducated, Habiba's parents enrolled her and her siblings in the local school and, like many students whose parents were not educated, Habiba quickly took responsibility for her education. She explained

> growing up, I had to motivate myself and take charge of my education because even if you bring homework home, no one can help you to do your homework. Everything is by done by you. Even your report card, if they take it, they [her parents] won't even know whether you did well or not. You alone know what you are doing. (Interview, 9/11/17)

(Picture: 1 of an empty truck (local transportation device) and a loaded truck carted by two men)

Picture: 2 of a local chop bar

Curious about what that responsibility looked like and most importantly what drove her to pursue an education when she did not have that example in her immediate family setting, I asked Habiba what excited her about her education and requested her to share with me her educational journey from as far back as she could remember. With a deep sigh and a gentle, reserved smile, she responded "It was a big hustle full of challenges and difficult times, that's what comes to mind. As for hustling, I am a hustler" (Interview 9/11/17). I further pushed her to tell me more about this hustle giving me examples when she could. Again, she gave me that reserved smile and began:

> What gets me excited about my education is my hope to change the narrative of my family and other children like me. Growing up, I saw how much suffering my parents and siblings had to go through because we were poor, and my parents did not have any education to get a good paying job. I also did not want my younger siblings, especially my sister to become a kayayo like me.
>
> I have always wanted to be a teacher. When I was ten years old, I saw someone in a graduation gown and hat in a newspaper on the floor while I was carrying goods in the local market for a client. I think the person was a teacher and I was elated by the picture that I told myself when I grew up, I would be just like that person in the picture. I didn't know what that picture was about, but there was something on education written on the picture, so I knew it had something to do with education. I told myself that if I also wanted to wear that gown and hat, I had to take my education seriously. Although I don't have the parents who could encourage me to achieve that, I had to hope and believe in myself.

I interrupted her and asked if she still had that picture and she responded very enthusiastically: "yes, I picked the picture from the ground that day and kept it. I still have it." She went ahead and continued with her story but this time with a somewhat sad look.

> In 2005, when I was only 14 years, my dad passed away. My mum couldn't pay for the rent even though we were in one room. She also couldn't pay our school fees, electricity bills, and water bills so we returned to the North. We had a family land there where we thought we could farm to get food and even sell some of the produce. In the North, there was no electricity for us to worry about paying electricity bills.
>
> Unfortunately, things did not work out as we planned because with our culture when a woman's husband dies, she is required to marry someone from the husband's family as custom demands. My mum was required to remarry my father's brother, but she didn't want to because the man she was supposed to marry already had three other wives and they all had children. She thought she was better off working on the farm to take care of her three children rather than to be part of that family. However, because she refused to marry the man they gave her, they took the family land away from her. I was in Junior High School (JHS) Form 2 then.
>
> My mother's brother in Kumasi offered me the opportunity to live with them so that I can help his pregnant wife and can complete my JHS in Kumasi. While I was with him, I would wake up early to do the household chores before I go to school. When I return from school, I will cook and do everything that needed to be done in the house. That was my life until I finished Junior Secondary School.

Collectively caring for the children of a deceased parent is a common practice among many African families. While this brings some financial relief to the surviving parent, it comes with a lot of burden on the children as seen in Habiba's case. She had to assume all the responsibilities of cleaning, cooking, taking care of her uncle's pregnant wife, and doing the household chores, yet still juggle the work required of her at school. Habiba, however, clarified that her uncle and his wife were kind to her because, as she explained, "at least they put me in school so doing the house chores and all that work was my contribution. I just had to be strategic with my schoolwork and know how to manage." She continued:

> When I wrote my BECE exams, I passed very well, but my uncle could not help me to continue. As a butcher who sold meat at the local market, he did not have enough money to take care of his family and fund my secondary school education as well. He suggested to me to take up an apprenticeship in hairdressing, and upon completing in three years he will also offer to buy me a sewing machine for me to learn how to sew. I did well in my exams, so I wanted more than that; I wanted to be a teacher, so I did not go to school for a year. I worked as a kayayoo (female head porter, common in large city markets in Ghana) at Bantama market in Kumasi.

> I carried people's loads for a fee and made about GHC15 [approximately $3] a day, so I could save money to go to secondary school. I remember sometimes going without food and sleeping on dirty floors in the market. I was exposed to so many dangers like men who would want to abuse you at night in the market. I had to sometimes wear jeans, trousers

[pants] to sleep to protect myself from men who may want to rape me. It was very dangerous and unsafe, but I had to do it.

(Pictures of two female head porters (kayayoo) carrying goods and following their clients)

She continued:

After working as a kayayo for a year, I was able to save to buy my chop box (wooden storage used by students in Ghanaian boarding schools), pay my admission fee, and other school things I needed and finally enrolled at Bolga Girls Secondary School where I studied Business for four years as a boarding student.

Although the school fees were not high at Bolga Girls, I couldn't afford it because I could not work while in school and I had no source of income, so, during the long vacation, I will go back to Kumasi, to work as a kayayo so I can save money, do my mother and my two siblings' National Health Insurance, and pay my school fees before I go to school. Throughout my time in secondary school, I borrowed textbooks from my friends when they were not using them because I could not afford them.

Sometimes when I go to Kumasi to work I was forced to stay for one week or one and half weeks long after school had reopened because I would not have made enough to pay for

my fees, so I sometimes will come to school late but when I'm finally able to make it to school, I study hard to catch up, and my friends helped me, so I always did well. In all of this, I will say that even though my mother was illiterate, she was very supportive, despite her not understanding the educational system. She would always tell me that she doesn't want her daughter to end up like her. So, I should study hard. She has been very supportive. So, that was my life for four years until I graduated from Senior High School, and again I did very well.

When I finished secondary school, my plan was to work for another year as I did for my secondary school, get money, and go to the Teachers Training College because at the training college I will be given some monthly allowance which I'll use to pay for my school fees and support my mum to take care of my younger siblings, and I was sure to get a job when I completed. This time, my mother offered to come with me to Kumasi to also work to support me. Because we didn't have anyone to take care of my two younger siblings, we brought them along. My mother was working in a chop bar, and I was a kayayo. This was in Agogo. Atonso Agogo in Kumasi.

One day while going to buy firewood for cooking the banku (local dish) at the chop bar, my mother was knocked down by a trotro (local bus). The accident affected her leg, and we spent all our savings on the hospital bills. That tragedy, however, ended well because through a blood donation I made to a young girl while my mother was on admission at the hospital, I was introduced to CAMFED by the recipient's mother. CAMFED assisted me

in applying to several universities, and I gained acceptance to all of them, but I chose the one which offered me a full scholarship.

I was fascinated by Habiba's incredible kindness to offer to donate blood amidst her misfortune with her mother's accident and the impact it had had on her plans to go to school. She explained: "At least my mother was going to be okay. When I saw the way, the woman was crying because her only child needed blood and they could not find a match, I had to try." Merriam (2009) asserts that "stories are how we make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us" (p. 32). At this point, I wanted to understand that sense-making process was taking place with Habiba's narrative and mainly make meaning of how she conceptualized *hustle* about her experiences. I, therefore, zoomed in to understand more about this notion of *hustle* which she had mentioned earlier in her narrative and even embodied with her declaration that she was a "hustler." I proceeded by asking:

> **M:** Habiba, in our next round of questions, I want to understand the concept of "hustle" as it relates to your educational journey. I want you to help me to know what you mean by your life was a hustle and you being a hustler? So, tell me what you meant by you being a hustler and tell me with examples of how you have *hustled,* especially as you now tell me about how you navigated college?

She recounted:

> My first year in college was the worst and the lowest of my entire college experience. I had a constant feeling like an outsider, I had a very lowself-esteem and always felt like I had to catch up with my colleagues because I could not understand anything, my school work, my professors, I could not even understand them when they spoke, it was as if they had a

different language and the entire system was basaaaaah (Akan word connoting confusion/commotion). I doubted myself a lot and had several mixed emotions.

Sometimes I told myself, “so Habiba you are here with the son of the President of the Republic of Ghana. It means I have done well.” However, I recall there was a day two of my classmates came to me to seek help from me in solving a question. I looked at the question and told them that oh I couldn’t answer it, then the person told me, “why can’t you solve it? Are you not a scholarship student?” And the other colleague said to me if he were to be me he will just go and kill himself because one, I am poor; two, I am not intelligent; and three, I am ugly. So, what am I doing on this earth? That affected my self-esteem and brought it down even more.

In my classes too, let’s say we are doing programming, right? I am not comfortable on the computer so if I am looking for a key, say A; I had to look for a long time so by the time I will type a word, they have already finished making the point, whoever is talking would have been long finished. And my lecturer was Stanley (Professor’s name changed to conceal identity). So you can imagine. At the end of the semester, I failed programming.

Where I come from, I don’t read a lot; reading is not part of our culture growing up. I don’t still like reading. So sometimes when you go to class, and they use unfamiliar language, it is difficult to follow the lecture. For example, when they use famous people as examples, when I was in my village, I didn’t know who those people were so even though most people in the class understood the person in the example could follow, I did not know, so it was

challenging for me to relate to the example that some of the lecturers gave. So that one too was a struggle for me.

My writing was terrible. I believe that the way one speaks English depends on how they have been brought up in the house. If your parents are educated, as you grow up, they will tell you that oh Habiba gets up, sit and learn all that in English. But if your parents are not educated, they will tell you all that and communicate with you most of the time in your local language. So, the first place you learn English is at school. And if the school is basaa, like throughout my life I went to a public school. When your school is basaa, you can imagine. So written and oral communications to I failed.

The only course I passed was Design and that one kraa (Akan word to explain that even that) I had a C. So, at the end of my first semester in college, I failed three out of the four courses I took. My GPA (Grade Point Average) was 1.25/4.00, which meant by that if I don't perform well in the second semester, I would have to leave— I will be kicked out. The only reason I was not sacked at the end of the first semester was that the university policy did not sack first-year students during the first semester to help them adjust.

At this point, Habiba began to sob. I offered her some tissue and encouraged her to take a break. I opened the untouched bottle of water I offered her before our interview. Not knowing what to do and equally feeling overwhelmed by her emotion, I shared a few tears too and asked her to continue whenever she wanted to do so. I reminded her of her option to only share what she wanted, and I believe, feeling a little embarrassed, she started apologizing for crying. I reassured her that

it was okay to cry and that I cried because I could not imagine what I would have done if I were in her position. I shared with her how much I admired her courage, endurance, and told her there was nothing to apologize for. When she was ready to continue, I asked her how she was able to handle all that and not give up. She responded:

> My name came up on the list of students on warning, so they [the school] assigned me two advisors, the Dean of Students and one faculty. So, what I did was every week I will go to the faculty for us to plan my week. What I had to do and how to do it. Then the following week when we meet, I will give her a step by step account of how the week went, what challenges I faced and things like that, she will give me advice on what to do. Then we will plan again.
>
> Sometimes I will go to the Writing Center and ask for help, but some of the advisers there were not supportive and were not willing to help me. It was like they were selective because I sometimes see them assisting other students when they tell me they were done for the day it was tough getting someone to read my work for me. But the Academic Advisor assigned to me who later became my permanent advisor was very supportive. She attached a specific writing advisor to me to help me with my writing. So, with that, I was able to improve.
> I also sought for help from upper-level students who were good in courses I struggled with and used the Faculty Interns a lot as for help I ask for help from people because I realized that was the only way. I also asked for help a lot from other scholarship students like me who were very good because they were very welcoming to me as if they understood me.
> So, I was close to them. As for help, I ask help because I didn't want to go home, yeah. And my advisors also helped me a lot. Although I felt sometimes, she did not understand

me because she was an American woman. Sometimes when I tell her things she doesn't understand, like cultural things, she will go and google it and be able to help me. Sometimes if I want to cry, I go there and start crying. Crying didn't solve the problem, but any time I cried, I felt better. I get this new hope in me that I can do anything.

As for the Dean of Students, I will say I went to her most of the time to cry when I am overwhelmed and don't know what to do. I cried many many times, and she offered me a lot of tissue to just cry. She won't say anything; she just allowed me to cry. So that was my life. I felt like I had worked so hard to get to college so, if I failed, then I will just pack my things and go back home, back to where I was, back to be a kayayo. And that will be my life. I had to change the story of my family. So, if I go back, then we will remain where we were. However, if I can finish school at least, I will get a better job.

I remember the way some of my colleagues treated me when I first got here; I did not want any of my siblings also to be treated that way. So, I asked for a lot of help. Even if people insulted me before helping me 'kraa'; I will still go ahead to ask them for help. That's what I did. At the end of the second semester, my GPA had gone up to 3.00/4.00 from 1.25 in the first semester, and from there I have been able to improve on my grades.

Like I said if you know your purpose, it doesn't matter what anyone will tell you. I reminded myself daily of why I was in college, and when things got tough beyond me, I will just go to the Dean of Students to cry to console myself. Sometimes if it is about specific people being mean to me, she will even 'blast' (local jargon for a reprimand) them.

I also stayed away from people who did not encourage me but continuously made me feel bad because of my background.

Contrary to some higher education literature which have reported that FGLIS did not know how to ask for help (Arzy, Davies, & Harbour, (2006); Choy, (2001); Engle & Lynch, (2011). Habiba's account suggests that indeed when she was faced with a situation which could potentially send her back home, she sought help from multiple people even to the point that she reported she did not care even if people would insult her. Habiba suggested that she was ready to do whatever it took, so she did not return to her impoverished family condition but be in a better position to change her family's narrative of poverty.

I proceeded to push her further to explicitly and in her own words, define *hustle*. She responded: *"Hustle" to me, represents the challenges that you face. Like the difficulties that you encounter and how you handle them. That's what comes to mind."* With that definition, I proceeded to find out from her whether she thought she was now successful and how her hustle had contributed to that success. She responded:

To me, success is not about GPA. Although with my current GPA, I will say by the academic standard I am successful. Success to me is about using what you have achieved to make other people's lives better even if you struggled to gain that success. I will say that my success was not easy. I had to do a lot of work before I got here. In my case, when I finished SHS, I was the only one in my home village who passed the secondary school exams. In my village when you have a motor, it is a big deal. My friends' parents had motors which took them to school, but I had to walk with my 'things' to school. But I was still able to do better than them because I was very determined. I am a very determined

person. That is what hustling does to you. You become committed to achieve your goal no matter the hardship.

I feel that if I had everything, I wouldn't have worked hard. Working to pay my school fees was very hard. So, I had to pay attention to my studies so that I could pass my exams. Because I used to work to pay my school fees and knew how difficult it was, I felt very privileged when I got to know how much was being spent on me through my scholarship and that also made me determined. In all of this, the challenges I faced and how I struggled through it helped me to have a better understanding of what was at stake and gave me many experiences of how to be tough through difficult circumstances.

So right now, through various projects, I am working to help students who don't get their upbringing from parents who are educated. When I had the opportunity to advise students like me, I tell them to be determined. They should know what they want in life in the first place. I also ask them to have something to look forward to achieving at the end of the day. If you have something that you want to achieve at the end of everything, there is no way you will allow things to get in your way. You will always pick yourself up, no matter how challenging it is because you are working for a goal.

I feel people with my kind of background should also make use of people, i.e. they should seek and ask for help. I know people who even when they are failing, will not ask for help. Nobody knows everything. I was able to succeed because I asked for a lot of help. Some people won't mind you but don't let that deter you. There are other people who will be

willing to help, try, and find those people. And the faculty and the many resources we have. They should use them.

Again, Habiba articulated clearly how she cultivated and accrued networks and institutional resources to support her success. This capacity again contradicts what has been stated in the literature about how FGLISs do not possess the needed capital to succeed . In Habiba's case, she was able to build relationships with institutional agents like her Academic Adviser, the Dean of Students and Writing Center Tutors, who formed her social capital. Habiba demonstrated what Yosso (2005) calls navigational capital. Yosso argues that many minorities and disadvantaged students (including FGLISs) possess and use in the higher education system to navigate structures and conditions they struggle with.

I thanked Habiba for her time and kindness in sharing her journey of hustling with me. As I ended Habiba's interview, I concluded from what she shared that her story and definition of *hustle* was a story of determination, hope, and staying focused as well as developing and seeking resources to help meet set goals in her case, her goal of becoming a teacher. Habiba's story of hustle also suggests the capacity to endure, resourcefulness and significant hope in the face of seemingly impossible situations like her failing all her courses in the first year and remaining determined for the sake of her family to improve herself, so she could also improve the lot of her family and that of others around her. Habiba successfully graduated with a degree in Business Administration and secured a job in a local school where she is a teacher, manages a community Math Lab for the school and is planning to embark on an MA degree in Education.

Sophia's Story: Fluidity and Adaptability to Life's Circumstances

MMERE DANE - Time changes**:** Symbol of change, life's dynamics.

"In life, we must be able to adapt to the changing times as nothing is permanent; being able to change as circumstance around you change and moving with the time is key to survival."
(Sophia, Interview, 10/27/2017)

Sophia's story offers yet another unique lens to the concept of hustle different from that of Habiba. Unlike Habiba, Sophia did not want to liberate her family and other people like her. In her own words, she asserts "The main motivation behind me struggling to be educated is that I get to be able to do something for myself on my own so, I know that at the end of this I won't be dependent on someone."

Sophia arrived at my home for the interview in a very calm and collected mood. Unlike her other colleagues, she exhibited a lot of maturity, which I sometimes felt was far beyond her age, but I soon understood where that maturity came from. She had experienced life in ways that had forced her to grow and mature in order to survive. After going through the usual introductions and explaining the purpose of the study, Sophia took over the conversation, and I did not interrupt her for the first 45minutes of our discussion. She began:

> I am a Kenyan, an only child born to a single mother who later passed away, so I will say I am an orphan. I do not know my father, I never met him, and my mother never told me about him. We lived in an extended family setting, so everyone was raised by someone at some point, and we shared a lot. Most of my mum's siblings lived together until they left their parent's house. My mum worked as a kindergarten teacher when she was alive.

At some point, we moved to Rwanda for economic reasons because there were no jobs in Kenya for my mum. She got an opportunity to go and work in Rwanda, so we moved to Rwanda when I was ten or eleven and stayed there till now. When she passed on, I still stayed there with some friends. Sort of an adopted kind of way. I am conflicted. When I am in Rwanda, they don't see me as a foreigner. They see me as one of them. But when I am in Kenya I am also part of them; it's quite tricky. And now there is the Ghanaian aspect. I am someone who quickly adapts to a new place I like that about me.

The primary motivation behind my education is that I get to be able to do something for myself on my own. So, I know that at the end of this I won't be dependent on someone. Because I've noticed that in my family, people are dependent on each other. For example, my mum's elder brother, my uncle, he is the one who holds everyone together, to be financially independent. So, everyone in the family depends on him. So, my primary motivation is to get myself out of that situation to be able to rely on myself. My uncle is a mechanic. He has a garage, so most of my other uncles get to work there. I think everyone has passed through that garage at some point, although it's not a big garage. He has his own family, but at every point in time, it's never just his own family living with him. There is always someone else in the house, and it's just a two-bedroom house in Nairobi.

Initially, I had to go to school a year earlier than everyone else because there was no one at home to stay with. Everyone had to go to work, so I could not stay home alone. That was in kindergarten, I then moved to the primary school. My mum's whole effort was directed at me since I was the only child, so I was taken to a very good primary school. From there

I had to move to a boarding school because my mum moved to Rwanda alone for some time before I joined her. I also had to move to the boarding school because there was nowhere for me to stay when she left. So, I stayed in the boarding school until the post-election violence in Kenya. At that point, my mum had to move me to Rwanda because it wasn't very safe for me to stay in Kenya especially because where my school was situated was a very tribalistic place and I was the only one from my tribe in that area. So, I had to move to Rwanda to complete my primary school there.

In Kenya, you do eight years, but in Rwanda, you do six years of primary school. I was in class four, so I was supposed to go to grade five and six. When I got to Rwanda, I did the first term of grade five. And then in the second term, I was skipped [9]to form one, so I was the youngest in my class. I was only eleven compared to my peers, who were mostly thirteen years. I didn't know the language and the country had just moved to Anglophone from French and Kinyarwanda. I had to struggle to make that work. You can only imagine, I was just a primary school student who had just come to the country, and we were doing Chemistry, Physics and all which were very sophisticated for me, so it was quite difficult. Then I had to change school because the school increased their fees and mum just being a teacher, she couldn't afford the fees. I moved to another school called Gashora Girls Academy of Science and Technology, and at that school, you could pay fees in installments, so it made it easier for my mother. One year after moving to Gashora Girls,

[9] Skipping a child especially if they are intelligent is highly encouraged and very common at the primary school level in many African schools especially because of the financial implication of not having to pay for the class they are skipping. Many parents also pride themselves in their children standing out and will talk about it with a lot of pride.

my mum passed away. The school where she was teaching gave me a bursary to complete my high school, so I moved again from Gashora Girls Academy to my late mum's school.

I had to move back to Kenya because the family I was staying within Rwanda when my mum passed also had their challenges. They also had two kids who had just finished high school and looking to go to the university so that they couldn't accommodate a third person drawing from the same resources. The Kenya community in Rwanda was ready to fundraise for me after my high school education, but it was quite tricky. People were emotional when my mum passed but later were tired of giving. And it was a four-year program so how long were they going to keep on giving? So, after being away for six years, I was forced to move back to Kenya to live in my uncle's two-bedroom house, which then had about fifteen people.

I stayed home for almost a year before I got the scholarship to college. Before then, I had to struggle because you can't just sit at home for a year. I tried to look for scholarships and other ways of funding my education. In Kenya, they didn't want to give me government aid because they didn't understand my transcripts from Rwanda. They had to take them to another organization that converts to the Kenyan grading system before you are considered for government aid. However, there were so many students who studied in Kenya who also apply to the same aid, so I was not at the top list. They didn't care about my grades because I had A in all my classes. So, I was at home for a year before I got admission to my current college in Ghana, which also gave me a full scholarship. And that's how I moved to Ghana.

Up until this point, my main challenges were finance. That was my main worry. There was no way I would have gotten through high school, for instance if my mum's school had not given me the bursary. There was no way I could have raised that kind of money to push myself to this level. The none financial related challenges I faced in my education before college was moving to the same place that my mum worked. I had visions of my mum everywhere, and students knew my story. For some reasons, when you lose someone, people don't want to associate with you. I don't know why but for me no one wanted to be my friend. It was very, very difficult. To make it worse, I had to switch my academic focus from Sciences to Arts because the academic nature of the sciences was tougher and more challenging, and the life stresses I was going through at the time put me in a mental space where I could not perform well in science classes, and I was one year into my A-levels so I had to catch up and no one is your friend you can just imagine how tough that was. At that point, it became difficult for me to study because there was no one to help me.

I think people not wanting to mingle with me in that state is a cultural thing. They just feel when you are sad, you should be left alone to cope with it, and you should be able to figure yourself out as opposed to them befriending you to talk about it. People don't talk about it. They feel they will offend you but that you don't feel they will offend you. You just want somebody to talk to. But they think they will offend you, so they leave you alone. No one spoke to me about the lost. I had to figure things out myself, which was very hard. I associated myself with activities, so I was into everything that was in school. I was there. Even when I am not good at it, I was there. That was before college.

At this point, Sophia paused and in a very reflective gesture; she gave off a deep sigh as if to shake off a massive, unpleasant burden. The expression of relief was as if she was excited to have moved past that part of her narrative which she had chosen to share. Once she transitioned to recounting her experiences at college, our conversation became more interactive, and I got to engage with her more than during her narrative. I took the lead, once again, in what I term as our second phase of the discussion to ask her about how she conceptualized hustle and, like I had done with many of the other students, requested that she gave me practical ways she had hustled in her educational trajectory. She responded:

> **S**: So, let me say how we use it in Kenya. When someone says I am *hustling*, it means I am trying to get something difficult done, which is not easy. So, for example, if I say I am *hustling* for a job, it means I am trying to get a job. I am doing so many things to get a job. I am not getting it, but I am on my way there, I am working towards it. So, if this is the starting point and there is the finishing point, in between here, you are hustling to get there. That's how I think about it.
>
> **M:** When you bring that concept into the academic environment and your educational experiences, what does it mean to hustle?
>
> **S**: I believe it means you are struggling to do things that will help you attain your highest level of education that you feel will be great for you. In my case, the things that I have been through so far towards the attainment of my degree. Thus, the struggles and experiences, all of them together. For example, in addition to all the struggles I have experienced before getting to college, my first year in college was also challenging because, at that point, I had not discovered myself. I didn't know so many things and was easily intimidated. People

push me around, and I was not able to stand up to them. So, in group work, for example, some of my colleagues will do a trivial thing like they wouldn't include my name in the work although I contributed to it and I wondered why. Sometimes, they wouldn't tell me they were meeting, and at the end of the day, they say to the lecturer I wasn't working. So, people were always pushing me aside because they think you are a poor kid and not like them until you can finally say no, I wouldn't take this. So, in the first year, that was the hardest. As time moved on, I got to learn new things, I got to meet people and learned to stand up for myself, and it becomes better. Right now, no one can do that to me because I wouldn't take that.

Additionally, at my college, you need to work hard to be able to get your degre; otherwise, you will be kicked out. I have friends who have been kicked out. Meaning the hustle was too tight for them. Also, there were some financial challenges as well, although I was on a full scholarship. For example, in the first year, we had a group project at the E-Waste place at Agbogbloshie, which is very far from campus, and we had to go there to collect data every day. I had to make sure I had the finances to cater for the trip and all the things needed for the group work. I had to get work-study because my stipend wasn't enough to provide for all the trips which took my time.

With my background as a first-generation college-goers, and my financial background this is the only shot at having a better future, being at college. For me, this is the only good shot at having a better future. And so, knowing that, I had to make my academics work, I had to obtain the best in everything I do. Everything I did had to be well thought through

because it contributed to my outcome. For instance, if I can submit an assignment on time and get a good grade, it affects my final performance and how I will be able to move out of this situation at home to be in a better condition.

Sometimes I had to redo our group assignment when the group members don't put in their best because at the end of the day, it's to my benefit. I revise the work myself to the best of my capability and improve on it before submitting it because I know that regardless of what they want, I must make this work because my life depends on the quality of my work.

Hustling and Success

My academic success means a lot to me because I want to be different. In the family, no one has a career. People just do small things to make ends meet. But I want to be the one that has a career and not be dependent on anyone. I will say I am on the right path. Whenever I go back home, I always come back with this new energy to keep striving. My family situation drives me to hustle. Whenever I meet a new obstacle, I always remind myself that I have gone through worse than this can do to me. I had lived in a country all alone. I have gone through trauma and everything. So really, what is that assignment? There is nothing else, you know, I have been through the worse that I can be through.

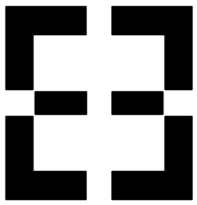
For people like me, the essential thing they should be paying attention to not to give up because before I came to college, for instance, I tried to apply to challenging schools in the US and they all rejected me although I had good grades. Situations might be stressful, but you must push yourself out of it. You must keep pushing and not just take no for an answer.

> With that said, however, I think students with backgrounds like mine are adaptable. So whatever challenges you might put them in they readily adapt to it and figure things out. They find a solution to it. People in authority may not trust their capabilities to do that because some of them might not have the right English, or they might not be what you expect them to be, but they are adaptable.

Upon her graduation, Sophia took up a job with a market research firm in Ghana. She explained that Ghana had become home to her for the past four years and so she wanted to settle in Ghana and visit Kenya whenever she could. I was not very surprised by her decision to stay in Ghana due to the fluid nature of the life she led. Additionally, although she expressed giving her family members an example of how they could be independent through her own life, she expressed aspiration and demonstrated l she hopes they will see her improved lifestyle irrespective of her location.

Sophia's story matched her definition of hustle as a continuous struggle to obtain one's objective. Her life story was marked with many misfortune and uncertainties from being orphaned at an early age in a country with no direct family members. Sophia, however, demonstrated multiple capacities to act at various points to combat and get through her adversities. Various examples include standing up to her colleagues at college, taking up the job of a work study to gain additional income for her project work and going the extra mile to complete her assignment to get good grades when her colleagues in her group decided not to do their part of the task. Sophia's capacity to act again demonstrates the agency and proactiveness of FGLISs in pursuit of their aspiration contrary to the existing deficient assumptions often attributed to them which presents them as passive and lacking what it takes to succeed.

GMax's Story: The Responsibility to Make an Impact



WOFORO DUA PAA - When you climb a good tree

Symbol of support, cooperation, and encouragement. From the expression "Woforo dua paa, na yepia wo" meaning "When you climb a good tree, you are given a push." More metaphorically, it means that when you work for a good cause, you will get support.

"In my culture, it's a big thing to give value to things that have been given to you. So I don't take the responsibility that comes with my scholarship lightly."
(GMax, Interview, 09/23/17).

Stories are compelling, but even more powerful is the ability they allow the storyteller to decide what is told, how the story is told, and the specific meanings and emotions ascribed to each word used to tell that story. Such was the story of GMax, a very calculated, thoughtful, and brilliant young man. He skillfully embodied street smartness and intellectual excellence and exhibited purpose and a great deal of intentionality in every action he took to fulfill his dream. GMaxs' narrative focused on an intense and sustained goal to build the needed capacity he believed could help him change the negative mindset of dependency of the African continent through his aspiration to become an educator, a University professor to be precise.

Early Education and the Impact of Encountering "Difference"

In our first interview, GMax recounted:

> I grew up in a family of three siblings; both of my parents are still alive and a grandmother. That's my nuclear family. My father attended school up to primary three. However, my mother never went to school, and neither did my grandmother. I am the first of my parent's

children to go to college. But all four children are in school. One of them is now teaching. He went to the Teacher Training College; he obtained a diploma. The other one is in secondary school now, and the younger brother is in Junior High School (JHS) two. I am the second of the four children.

What we do for a living mostly is farming; subsistence farming. Of late my father has started doing some dry season plantation, growing onions in the dry season then towards April-May he will sell some of them to help sustain the family. But besides that, we farm in the rainy season and use that for food in the dry season. Our education mostly has also been financed through the income my parents make from the farming activities. When we need something in school, we sell some of the food we produce in the rainy season to help pay our fees. That's it about my family background.

With that introduction, GMax went on to narrate his educational pathway by explaining how he had progressed or moved on from seeing schooling almost as a rite of passage to now having a great and more profound purpose of using his education in a significant way to create and affect change. He recounts not starting school until he was eight years— two years older than many of his peers. GMax explained that juggling school and his family responsibilities had been severe; however, he was excited about school and the opportunity it gave him to accumulate different forms of knowledge to equip him for change in the future. He explained:

I haven't had a straightforward education, but then I get excited about it. What I have always wanted to do is to acquire a lot of knowledge about how my environment operates and how people make decisions, so, that makes me like a philosopher although I do

Computer Science in college. I like Philosophy and Computer Science. I want to lecture in a higher institution one day, and that gets me excited about my education because throughout my life I have enjoyed the mentorship of faculty and my teachers as well and I want to give that back to the younger generation. From primary one to JHS 3, I will say I was excited by school, but I didn't know what education was. I wanted to just go to school.

He further recounted some of the challenges he encountered during his primary and secondary school days and how that did not deter him from persisting because of his love for acquiring new knowledge and broadening his understanding of how the world works. He explained the importance he associated to both school and his family responsibilities which seemingly caused his destruction from school, emphasizing his perspective of the family principle of work and contribution to what one benefits from which to him was his routine chores. He recounted:

One major challenge I faced was financing my education through primary school and finding the time to study because I had to take care of the family cattle. That was the norm, the boys looked after the cattle, that was their contribution to helping the family, so I just had to do it because I had to help my family. That meant I could only attend school for a few numbers of days in the week and when I went to school, I had to regularly go back to the house during break time to attend to the animals on the farm, then on weekends, I go to the farm if I don't look after the cattle.

There was no rest or time to study because when I come back from school, I must again go to the farm and help my parents. One of my uncles and I took turns with taking care of the cattle. I will do that for three days, and he will do for three days as well. In a week, I will sometimes not attend school for either two days or three days. I did that throughout my

primary education. I had to combine school with taking care of the animals entrusted to me. Despite all that, I religiously went to school whenever I could, although I didn't know what I wanted to do with my education or the purpose for which I had school as part of my routine.

This routine continued until I wrote the Basic Education Certificate Exams (BECE). At that time, I just wanted to try out Science. I didn't know what it entailed. I chose science, and luckily, I passed and got admission to Nandom Secondary School. It was there that I realized there was probably more to education than I imagined. I think it's good to highlight this that when I was growing up, most of the people around me were teachers. Even now, the situation hasn't changed much in my community. The highest form of education is teaching. One could only think of being trained as a teacher as the highest form of education and profession to ever aspire to, so people who were "prominent" in my community went to the Teacher Training College[10]. But when I got to Nandom, it was different. I met people from different communities and backgrounds who came from across the country, not just from the Northern Region where I come from. They had high ambitions, and I could interact with them on different academic levels. Somehow, their ambitions infused into me, and I began thinking not to attend Teacher Training College but go higher. Then I began to focus more. Education became something to fight for to obtain a higher ambition. That was in secondary school.

[10] In Ghana, Teacher Training Colleges are normally the last resort to people who do not have good enough grades to gain admission to the traditional University track or who do not have the financial resources to pay for the cost of attending a traditional University. The later reason is however the key attraction to many as Teacher Training Colleges provided monthly stipends in the form of allowances which students sometimes saved towards their ultimate aim of going to the University. This is a popular pathway to many students from low-income backgrounds.

Gaining Access, Navigating College and Establishing Purpose for Educational Attainment

Many of the participants in this study established at a very early stage in their interviews their perceived catalytic effect of education to help position them in careers [better than their parents'] so they can change the negative and challenging impact of the low-socioeconomic status of their families. Some also indicated that despite the many challenges they faced throughout their educational journeys, it was critical for them to continue persisting to improve their life chances and that of their families and sometimes communities. GMax, however, seemed to have had a much bigger purpose for his education beyond himself or that of his family; albeit his recognition of the financial challenges, his family faced as a result of their socioeconomic background. Through broadening his interaction and breaking away from his immediate community to go to a boarding secondary school, he affirmed the assertion often made by scholars with respect to student identity formations that explains the impact of encountering different perspectives to disrupt and cause change in student identity development (Baxter Magolder, 2001, 2007, 2014; Jones, Abes & Quaye, 2013; Strayhorn, 2016).

Strayhorn (2016), for instance, alludes that "encountering perspectives that are new and different causes the cognitive dissonance that is required to catalyze search for new ways of knowing" (p. 127). In his case, however, GMax did not just reject the status quo to aspire to be a "simple" teacher like the example he had seen in his village, but he resolved to be a higher version of that and explains that he wanted to be a university lecturer. using computer science to change the mindset of students to be innovative and empower themselves to improve their narratives. To achieve this outcome, he had to gain a university education to enable him to develop the skillset and accumulate the knowledge he needed first to transform himself, so that he can later change young people on the African continent. GMax went on to recount how he invested in attaining this

vision and the many challenges he had to contend with to stay true to the multiple identities he carried with him which impacted his experiences in many ways. He recalled:

> Again, I passed my Senior Secondary Certificate Exams. However, there was no money for me to go straight to college. Although I passed very well, my family could just not afford it. I had to farm for a year, during the dry season so I could save some money but what I kept was still not enough to apply for colleges and all the associated cost that came with it.
>
> Additionally, I was ill-equipped about the entire educational space in Ghana and did not understand and know the options available to me and the college application process. Luckily, I met some students from my current college in my community who introduced me to the university and helped me to apply. I didn't have to pay for the application fee, which made a huge difference financially, and the University also offered me a full scholarship.
>
> When I got to college with this incredible scholarship, my parents didn't believe it because they didn't think someone could invest as much into someone they hadn't seen before. But thinking about it, the person didn't just invest because they wanted to. They wanted to create some form of change in society and thought I could help them attain this change. Hence they are entrusting me with the responsibility to create a change which I take seriously. In my culture, it's a big thing to give value to things that have been given to you. Like the famous saying "unto those much has been given much is expected." So, I saw this as a privilege, although it was a big responsibility.

Also, when I got to college, I listened to the President of the University speak at one of our town hall meetings on why we need to effect change, which greatly impacted me. I remember reflecting on how throughout my education I had wanted to read but could not because the number of resources I could access was limited. And now suddenly, I was listening to great people like the president; had amazing set of faculties I could engage with; great internet which allowed me to read and feel what other countries are doing was just amazing.

I began to question the whole narrative that Africa is backward and became restless about what I could do to change that narrative. At my college, faculty constantly challenge us that if we want to effect change, then change must begin with us. I think it is big rhetoric in my college which engenders in us the responsibility that comes with the benefit we've been entrusted with through our education which makes us feel that we need to make an impact.

The way I am thinking about creating this impact is to change the dependency mindset of Africans. In my community, for instance, people still have that mindset that everything should be done for them. I am thinking highly about that. I need to prove to them through my life and by doing things that will be useful in the community, so they can see that we could achieve greater heights if we are willing to work hard at it without necessarily always relying on politicians for external support.

I also want to impact change through cultivating intellect in Africa, and that's why I want

to go into education because I feel teachers have a significant influence on the culture of any society. At every stage in life, if there is a teacher, it will help to liberate the mind to spark high ambitions that would excite creativity. When that happens, people would be very, very prepared to face the challenges they encounter and also explore the opportunities available to them. If I can help cultivate intellect in Africa. That will be my impact.

Through the multiple encounters and exposures GMax was engaging with at his college environment, from his meeting with various persons he considered influential and the resources available to him and most importantly the familiar "rhetoric" to all students who seem to empower them. He further demonstrated the impact of the community and the context of one's environment to affect their worldview. To GMax, this impact became stronger and firmer with every encounter.

At this point in the interview, I was overwhelmed with great amazement at the very "philosophical" views and mindset of young GMax which set him apart from not only the rest of the youth in this study but also the many youth I have encountered in my entire career as a student services administrator. It challenged the popular narrative of the lack of ability of students like GMax from first-generation and low-income backgrounds to aspire but presented critical examples of how such students given the right context can also aspire just like their counterparts in more financially privileged backgrounds.

GMax exhibited a high level of self-awareness of how he was developing, his newly attained privilege and the responsibility he felt came with it, as well as the influence his new surroundings contributed to helping him shape his aspirations. I was at this stage very curious to know how all of what he had shared connected to our last conversation about his conceptualization of *hustle* and how he experienced it through his educational trajectory. I transitioned the interview

to that topic and asked him to tell me about his understanding of *hustle*, with practical examples of how he had experienced hustle. He remarked:

> When I hear of the word hustling, I think of it as how one can juggle multiple vital things and manage all well to meet one's goals. So, when I think of *hustling*, I think of juggling because there are always numerous things you have to manage. You need to achieve this; you have to accomplish that, which all appear to be very important.
>
> I will say hustling still exists even at this point in my educational experience but in a very subtle form not like when I was in high school. Now I get stipends because of my scholarship. However, because of my background when I get the allowance it is not just for me, it is for my family and me, especially my younger siblings because I know how my parents have been like. As I indicated, my younger sister, the one who comes after me is in secondary school right now. Last year, for instance, when she got admission to secondary school, they had to pay a hundred cedis [about $21], the money wasn't readily available. Most of it came from my monthly stipend from my scholarship. Usually when that happens, I have to manage through the rest of the semester with whatever is left, which most of the time is nothing or something minimal.
>
> Another hustle is relating to people from very high economic backgrounds here in my college because they have different experiences from mine. I have come to see that people from different financial backgrounds are different from me, and that makes interactions very difficult because I don't have shared experiences to share with them. Right now, almost 90% of my friends are other scholarship students like me because we tend to share

similar stories. This situation bothers me because I believe sometimes it is not very beneficial. It is critical to engage with diverse people, not just from different places like nationalities, but also from different socio-economic backgrounds to understand at a very fundamental level why some of us behave the way we do.

I feel if you can't always integrate with them sometimes you imagine discriminations. When you do that because yu can't integrate you're likely to become cynical. You begin to feel there is some discrimination because you are from a poor background, and other people are from a wealthy background. Certain things get crazy. It's a common thing in my college and with scholarship students like me. There is this seeming discrimination, but I don't see it that way. I see that it's segmentation of interests. Like our interests don't align. For some reason, we need to find ways to align our interests. It's hard to explain it. That's a lot of hustling for me on campus. Sometimes you get close to people, and they are not interested in a way. You don't know why they are not interested, but then they are not affected. I can't figure it out.

With his explanation of not being able to interact with students from a more privileged background, GMax reiterated a common challenge many of the participants in this study encounter. However, it is important also to highlight that while many of the youth saw and rebelled against this as some form of discrimination of the "haves against the have- nots," GMax saw social divides as a genuine opportunity for things to be different. He went on to further explain:

In the classroom, I don't think I struggle because of who I am. Let me clarify that. For me, I believe that I have been privileged with the ability to understand things quickly. That has

been a great blessing to me. Because of that in the classroom, I am the reverse who help people. I tend to get all this kind of respect and this kind of comfort because I am academically excellent. I sort of control the engagement in class the way I want sometimes. People get amazed by my contributions in class. I don't struggle at all.

My experience growing up propels me to study outside the classroom much more. I wouldn't call that hustling because that's what I am supposed to do as a student, and I have been doing that all through my life. When I was growing up, I used to miss school a lot because of my family responsibilities so most of the time I had to study on my own to make up for what I miss in school, so I know how to study on my own. My only challenge in the classroom was with my accent when I first arrived. There were certain words I would say, and people don't get them, because of that when people first engage with me, they think I don't speak the right way. But once we got to know each other things have gotten much comfortable because they know I am still intelligent despite my accent.

Also, I believe that when you are in school— especially college— you need to build your social relations. You need to develop yourself holistically. Unfortunately, when you are from a background like mine, you need to balance the extent to which you engage socially with your academic work. The challenge then becomes: do you focus on only your academics? What happens when you focus solely on your academics all the time? Do you focus on just your academics and limit extra-curricular activities? To what extent do you balance this? Because, in the likelihood that I don't get the required GPA to stay in school, that will be it for me. I will have to go back to the house and begin from nothing. That

makes me weigh my extracurricular activities and engagements a lot toward my academic work because I know that's the only way that will sustain me in school. Sometimes it is not a particularly fulfilling thing to do, but I have to do it.

GMax again raised a common challenge faced by many of the youth in this study who felt compelled to focus on their schoolwork because of their fear of being withdrawn from the University should they not do well in their schoolwork. Like GMax, many participants in this study recognized the importance of engaging in extra-curricular activities to enhance their social relations and also build their interpersonal skills while expanding their network but were faced with the dichotomy of finding a balance granted what was at stake for them if their academics should suffer. Further elaboration on this theme will be provided in the next chapter.

Despite GMax's fear, he applied and was selected to participate in a six week Applied Math and Research Experience (AMRE) summer paid internship through a University collaboration program with the College of Wooster in Ohio, USA, in which he worked with other College of Wooster students and faculty to consult for several US companies. He also presented at several academic conferences outside Ghana. GMax stated that he tried to gain as many social interactions as possible from these programs but also pointed out that he engaged in them because they were academically related and contributed to his schoolwork. He concluded that he was not so sure if he would have participated if there was not a direct academic linkage.

Benefits and Outcomes of Hustling

While his description of hustling was characterized by multiple challenges, negotiating complex choices, and juggling several requirements towards meeting his desired outcome, GMax identified several ways the process of hustling had shaped him, and his character of most importance is the contribution of his ability to hustle towards his success. He explained:

Hustling has made me very disciplined. For instance, during my primary school days when I had to look after cattle and all that; and I couldn't go to school on certain days; I had to contact my classmates for their notes and copy it so at least I know whatever they learned before I go to school. That taught me to be very disciplined with the use of my time.

Hustling has also helped me a lot with planning and prioritizing. When I was growing up, my mother would wake up early and prepare food for us to eat before going to school, so we don't need to buy food at school because we did not have the money. So, at a very early age, we learned how to plan and prioritize. That kind of mentality was imbibed into us very early, so anytime I want to do something I always ask myself is this necessary. Then I begin to rank what is essential and what is not needed.

I prioritize a lot on my spending so that instead of my parents going out to look for money from someone else, by spending wisely I can support some part of the expenses in the house. Most of the time, my money is not enough, but I manage well, so it takes me through the semester. It is essential to say that with my background; we live in a communal setting whereby if you have something you need to support others who don't have. When you don't do that you are not following tradition and family life, that has been my guiding principle because of that I think of other people more, not just my family.

I have also learned how to plan; I know beforehand that I need to send an email to this person or call my parents; do some assignment. Because I plan towards everything I do, I don't run into specific problems like forgetting to do something to result in me going through some bureaucratic procedures to resolve all those things. Planning and prioritization have been the strategies I've learned over time through my hustle, and I have

been using it in all that I do.

Hustling and Success

I believe I have been successful in my academic life so far because I have already seen some aspect of my education has an impact on my life already. My thought process has changed phenomenally. I can understand and engage with society and social interactions, even complex issues like feminism and other social relations. And all these things, to some extent make me I will say a complete person. I have seen my college success already, but if it is going to be meaningful it has to lead to a change in society. And for me, I will be coming back to help glow the light on the continent. The intellectual base is significant to me. And I want to do that in the computer science field but not just teach students computer science. I want to teach students about computer science and social relation too. I feel society is a very complicated thing. In college right now, among my colleagues, I have attained that reputation of connecting everything to the society.

Success is a huge thing, and it can hardly be attributed to one single aspect of one's life. All of my hustling and experiences come together to make me who I am. For instance, if I went through all these hustling and my father had withdrawn me from school, then it would have been in vain, so my parent's support is also part of this success. Again, if when I got to high school and all these teachers that I always speak about taught me otherwise, then I could have turned out to be something else. And if I had not received the full scholarship from my college, I wouldn't have gotten to college. It's a culmination of everything that results in the outcome. But I think what ignited everything was that desire to put my best foot forward all the time and work through my challenges.

The problem with first-generation college students is that most of us don't turn to have guidance and mentorship directly from our families. When I completed secondary school, I stayed in the house for one year, which was normal. But when I began to think about going to school as I spoke earlier, I was very ill-equipped about the whole process of the educational space. My parents didn't even know what was going on from applying to college to going through the interview process. I remember during my college application; my parents were required to thumbprint one of the forms; I did it for them. I am sorry, but I did it for them. Because there was no way, I could get them to understand the process. And it's a massive challenge because there isn't anybody to correct you when you go wrong because nobody knows what is right with what you are doing and that's been a significant challenge to me. It's making me shoulder certain responsibilities that I sometimes feel is too big for my age. This situation is prevalent with many of my colleagues and people like me.

I do talk to my parents about my experiences in school but the way parent-child relationship in my community and culture is generally not helpful because in growing up I hardly discuss sensitive information with my parents and most of the time too you don't talk to them much. The only time I had the chance to speak to them was when we are on the farm together. Even then, we talk more about relationships and who owns what. It's just a way of making you understand where you belong in society.

But you don't talk more about your interests or what you want. It's more getting information. But you don't give it. I know that it's not the right way so I will bring up my

children in a better setting and engage with them more, so that is another way I have grown. Some of these things are some of the reasons why I get excited about social relations and how society operates and all that. I talk a lot with my mum, but we mainly joke about do not speak a lot about who I am becoming.

I think my parents have seen a lot of good in me based on my lifestyle whenever I get to the house. Because they have seen me for some reason, becoming more compassionate in a way after I got to college. I have also become more proactive in helping my younger brother and sister. Now my father understands my transformation and treats me like an adult. Maybe he didn't anticipate that I will grow to that. But he is happy. I look for opportunities to talk to them, and he is always excited about what I tell them (what I am learning), so it's been encouraging but they are not people that I can always share my problems with so if I face a decision in school, I have to try as much as possible to resolve it myself.

I must mention that although I did not get their guidance most of the time concerning my education, their most significant contribution to my success has been them allowing and trusting me to make some of the major decisions concerning my education. When I got to college, they didn't know how it all came about, but they were okay and trusted my choice and allowed me to go. Sometimes some parents are rebellious and can stop you when they don't understand. When you are so convinced about it, they may tell you not to go. Giving me the space to think about some of these problems in my life and find solutions to them myself has been the most significant support I've received from my parents.

I also believe that with my college success and my life, they have seen a lot more of why they need to support my siblings through their education. I think they don't make my siblings, for instance, go to the farm as often as they made me go. I believe a factor contributing to that is the transformation they see in me and a lot of openness in the world now because many parents somehow understand the importance of education much more.

GMax graduated with a near perfect final CGPA of 3.94 in Computer Science and was on the Dean's List throughout his four years at the University. At the time of graduating from his college, he was heading to London for a fully funded and paid nine-week summer internship with Goldman Sachs from after which he was scheduled to return to his college to work as a faculty intern for his National Service (a mandatory one-year service requirement by the government of Ghana). Although he could have completed this compulsory service with any company, GMax chose to be a faculty intern because he believed it would set him up for his ultimate aspiration of becoming a university professor. GMax has since gained admission to a five-year fully funded Ph.D. program in Computer Science at Dartmouth College.

Chapter Summary

In summary, I will echo the famous African Novelist Chimamanda Adichie's assertion that stories matter and many stories about people are critical to explaining who they are. This assertion challenges the single narrative, which has the danger of stereotyping a whole people. Through the detailed narratives of Habiba, Sophia, and GMax, I have presented multiple lenses through which to view some of the unique ways the youth in this study experienced 'hustle' and how the totality of their experiences contributed to their eventual success. I have also demonstrated that while each

of these youth shared a common background of disadvantage, their motivation for hustling was inspired by various aspirations which were different for each of them.

My purpose for highlighting the narratives of the three selected youth is to present a holistic picture of the complexities which characterized the conceptualization and enactment of hustle to draw on the nuance that exists within each story. In the following chapter, I will present connections between and across the narratives of all 17 participants in this study through the identification of themes within the data.

Chapter Five: Cross -Thematic Findings

NKYINKYIM – Twisting and turning
Symbol of initiative, dynamism, and versatility

Have an aspiration even if you don't know how to attain it and continue working and believing and hoping that things will turn out okay. If you don't believe that things will turn around, you will have very little motivation to continue. (Andile, Interview, 10/14/17)

Introduction

In this study, I sought to understand the concept of *hustle* as a navigational capacity and how first-generation low-income students use it to attain educational success. Using the unique ability for narrative inquiry to allow individuals to express how they make meaning of their experiences, connection with others, their identity, culture and worldview through stories (Spector-Mersel, 2010) and the opportunity for the researcher to co-construct and retell the narratives collectively developed with the researched (Creswell, 2009) extensive life story interviews and field notes were used to produce holistic, co-constructed narratives from the stories of each participant.

Chapter Four presented the holistic and complete co-constructed narratives of three focal participants in the study whose narratives helped answer the first research question: *What are the "hustle" narratives of first-generation, low-income students' educational pathways which contributed to their eventual success in an African university?* Although each of the 17 participants' narratives were unique and equally significant, for this dissertation, I presented the

comprehensive and holistic narratives of the three participants whose narratives are representative of the broader themes addressed in this study to offer in-depth examples of the myriad of ways in which the participants in this study experienced *hustle.*

While acknowledging the uniqueness of each participants' experience, analyzing the data together provides the opportunity to highlight the patterns of experiences and emerging broader themes across the participants' co-constructed narratives. This second stage of the analysis and presentation of the findings will present the trends of themes that emerged across all 17 stories of the participants. These stories helped to answer the second and third research questions: *What are the practical ways in which first-generation, low-income students perform hustle during their educational trajectory and highlight the unique dispositions and characteristics which contribute to their success?*

The chapter is organized into three parts. Part I presents the profiles of all 17 participants in the study which covers their demographic details and offers background data on their early education capturing the following themes: i) exposure to formal education; ii) parents' and significant adults' attitude towards education; and iii) education as a collective responsibility. Part II will present the data on the various ways the participants conceptualized and performed *hustling*, leading to Part III which offers the emerging themes on the multiple ways the participants envisioned their success and connected their success to their *hustle.* Part III will also highlight the common critical dispositions exhibited by the participants which they perceived to have contributed to their success. Across the various parts presented in this chapter, the stories of all 17 participants will offer numerous compelling examples of *hustling* at different points in their educational trajectory through their co-constructed narratives. The section will then end with a summary of all content contained within the chapter.

PART I: General Demographic Profiles and Background of Participants

As argued by Weber (1946), it is vital to situate and examine the social structures people live in to understand their life outcomes better. The themes emerging from this section are significant because they contextualize and situate the study as well as offer a deeper understanding of the conditions that may give rise to the concept of *hustling*. Family and both the social and environmental conditions the participants experienced provide a useful lens for understanding who the participants were in their lives at college and before college. Additionally, the lens will help understand the daily familial conditions that compelled them to *hustle* while pursuing an education as their only way out of their low socioeconomic statuses.

General Demographics of Participants

This study focused on the experiences of 17 students (nine males and eight females) between the ages of 21 and 26 years in their senior year of college from Ghana, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. All participants reported that they were the first in their families to obtain a college education (also known as first-generation), were from low socioeconomic backgrounds (also known as low-income) and had attained college success at an African university. For this study, *success* is defined ultimately by the completion of a college degree and also by the various ways the students in this study both conceptualized and articulated their college success.

The various conceptualizations of success are captured in Part III, which focuses on *hustle* and *success*. However, for a selection criterion, I worked with students who had a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 3.00 or better as a measure of the students' good academic standing at the university and high likelihood to graduate.

At the time of the interviews, each participant reported a CGPA of 3.00 and above and was in the first semester of their senior year. I further verified their final CGPAs, with their consent, at the Academic Registry of the university before their graduation. The final CGPA for the students ranged from 3.25 to 3.94. The final CGPA of each of the students is captured in the participant's profile table below alongside their respective ages, nationalities, genders, highest form of education of their parents and their description of their socioeconomic backgrounds. Also, each participant chose a pseudonym, which I used throughout the study.

All participants in this study self-identified as being the first in their immediate family, extended family, and sometimes in their entire village communities to go to college. They also used several descriptors to explain their socioeconomic conditions, which ranged from "low earners," "low-income status," and "humble background." Some participants provided more detailed descriptions of their family's socioeconomic background. Efua, for instance, explained:

> My family is a lower income one, where everyone depends on their survival tips to make a living for themselves, and possibly support others. Because we do not have a specified breadwinner, and our single parent (mum) does not work. We do not have a particular stream of funds where daily income comes from. (Efua, Interview, 11/25/17).

Andile, a female student from Zimbabwe, associated her socioeconomic status to the stream of income her family depends on and explained:

> My mum is not formally employed. She does small scale farming. Through the modest proceeds from the farm, we sell to pay the school fees and take care of the family needs, but it's not much, so I help. So far, I've been the breadwinner in the family since around the age of 14. I was elected to be a child parliamentarian at the age of 14 for my

constituency in Zimbabwe. Through that, I got money from different projects, and I invested that money in a poultry business at home which my mum takes care of when I'm in school. That was my first source of income for the family. Also, in school, I was involved in many activities like debate, public speaking, and different quiz competitions through which I received allowances for food each time we went out of school to compete with other schools. For instance, if they give like twenty dollars, I will spend like a dollar and the nineteen dollars I will invest it in something else for the family. So, it's through that I managed to support myself and my family as well. (Andile, interview, 10/14/17).

In another instance, Martin, a male Ghanaian student, explained how both parents generated their daily income through farming which he sees as resulting in their low-income status due to the very little income they produce and their lack of formal education and training to allow them to generate more. He describes:

> In terms of socio-economic background, my parents can't read or write, so the only source of income is farming, which is not much and not consistent. At times they get money there is no money. It's seasonal farming activities. So, in terms of socio-economic background, we are at the lowest level. (Martin, Interview, 10/15/17).

All the participants in this study were part of different comprehensive financial aid programs that targeted students from the bottom two socioeconomic quintiles in their communities. The scholarship covered their full tuition for the entire four years of their studies, a meal stipend, a laptop, medical insurance, a monthly stipend for personal upkeep, and a one-time allowance for stationaries at the beginning of every academic year. It also covered the cost of transportation to

and from their villages and countries (for international students) and to the university. Also, international students had a fully funded opportunity to go home twice during the four years of their study and were also supported to travel back if there is an emergency like the death of a close family member.

Table 1 below displays the demographic details of the participants including age, nationality, gender, highest form of education of their parents, their description of their socioeconomic backgrounds, and final CGPAs upon graduation.

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Chosen Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	Final CGPA	Highest level of education completed by parent(s) /guardian(s)?	Self-Reported Family Economic Status
Eli	Male	24	Ghanaian	3.69	Basic school	Low-income earners
GMax	Male	23	Ghanaian	3.94	None	Low-income status
Tawiah	Female	21	Ghanaian	3.75	Mum - Junior High School Father - Form 4	Low-income earners
Ahmed	Male	23	Ghanaian	3.69	Junior High School	We are low-income earners.
Evans	Male	22	Ghanaian	3.65	Mum- Middle school Dad - secondary and professional	Low-income

Martin	Male	25	Ghanaian	3.57	No formal education	My parents are caretaker cocoa farmers.
Efua	Female	22	Ghanaian	3.67	Basic education	My family is in the lower income bracket income comes.
Jead	Female	21	Kenyan	3.49	Secondary School Education (Father) and Primary School (Mum)	We are a low-income family.
Andile	Female	22	Zimbabwean	3.34	Secondary School (O'Level)	lower class
John	Male	24	Ghanaian	3.25	Secondary school	Low Income
Clive	Male	24	Ghanaian	3.34	Mum - Form 4 Father - Form 4	Low income earning
Habiba	Female	26	Ghanaian	3.26	No Education	low-Income Earners
Fee	Female	21	Kenyan	3.39	High school	My mum is the sole breadwinner of the family, and she does this through casual jobs.
Sophia	Female	21	Kenyan	3.11	Secondary school	Lower middle class
Kanye	Male	23	Ghanaian	3.07	Middle School	Financial Disadvantage
Suzy	Female	23	Kenyan	3.04	Form two-Secondary education	Humble background

Larson	Male	24	Ghanaian	3.75	Middle School Level	Low-Income Family

Early Experience with Education

Participants in this study attributed their academic success to the various ways they experienced education while growing up. Many of them attributed their sustained interest in education which led to their eventual college attendance to factors including i) their early exposure to formal education by their parents and the significant adults in their lives; ii) the attitude of the significant adults in their lives toward education; and iii) the collective responsibility demonstrated by members of their communities and families towards their education.

The participants in this study also expressed experiencing significant barriers to their early education, which helped them to develop a "can do spirit and attitude." These experiences reminded them later in their educational journeys of how far they had come and how important it was for them to complete and succeed in their education, especially when they encounter difficulties. This ability to persist is demonstrated throughout this chapter, particularly in Part II, when the participants tell stories of their *hustle* performance.

Exposure to Formal Education.

Across their stories, participants expressed significant exposure to formal education, which they explained came in various ways. According to participants, their early exposures to formal education significantly impacted their educational experiences and often helped them to know their academic abilities. For some of the participants, this exposure came from their immediate families, the friendships they kept, the positive influence of significant adults and institutional agents in their lives, as well as the type of communities they lived in. Evans, for instance, reported that his

early education was influenced by the various outcomes of people who were educated around him. He recounts:

> I have studied people around me and how education has helped them to achieve a lot in their lives. I believe that if I also follow that same path, then I will also be able to go far with my education. (Evans, interview, 11/11/17).

For Kanye, his mother sold roasted plantains in one of Ghana' public universities, and they lived in a small rented room near the university. His presence on campus made him see students graduate each year, go to classes and visit libraries on the university's campus. He reported that watching the students experience college motivated him to aspire to be like them. Throughout their stories, participants said that these early experiences and exposures to formal education helped them imagine the better futures education could provide beyond what they saw in their immediate families and, sometimes, communities.

Parents and Significant Adults Encouragement for Education

Another dominant theme in many participants' co-constructed narratives was their parents' and significant adults' attitudes towards their education. All the participants in this study reported growing up in families where their immediate family members did not have a postsecondary education; however, all the participants indicated firm commitments to and positive attitudes about their education by the parents and significant adults in their lives. They explained the various ways they saw their parents, and significant adults demonstrate this commitment to their education had a substantial impact on them seeing education as vital. Jead, for instance, explains:

> My mum didn't get the chance to go to high school because she was the firstborn among her siblings, so she had to stay at home and take care of her younger siblings. Even though

she was young, she did everything to make sure that her siblings went to school, she would help out with their schoolwork with the little knowledge she had from primary school. So, when it came to us, she did everything out of her way to find the money for our school fees and books. Contributing always to our school showed us that she cared for our education. My dad became sickly so that he couldn't help much, but the times he was well, he would also go out of his way to make sure we go to school do our homework. All these contributed to our education when we were growing up. (Jead, Interview, 9/23/19)

For GMax, his parents demonstrated their support for his education through the various time and limited resources they invested in his and his siblings' education. He recalled:

My parents, they have been very instrumental. None of them got any significant formal education, my father went to P3 and stopped, and my mum never went to school, but they have all been instrumental. When I was in primary, my mum will wake up daily around 4 am and prepare so we can get to school and get numbers. Because if you don't get to school early to get a number, they will punish you for coming late, and we lived far from the school. The numbering used to end around 7 am, but we were always on time.

Every day my mum will wake up early to warm the soup, for us to eat before going to school.

On weekends she will wash our uniforms so at least we were always clean. My father was very supportive, too, in terms of our uniforms. If it is torn, for some time he will look for income to get it sewn. He never really discouraged me from going to school. I think he understood the value of education better than most of his peers in the community because

some people were not supportive of their children at all, but he was very supportive. (GMax, Interview, 9/23/17)

To Eli, his grandma's dedication to his education when his mum died, and his father's inability to support his education, stood out to him when he recalled his early education experiences. He explained that although his grandmother did not have any form of formal education, she believed that her life could have been more comfortable if she had gone to school. So, she dedicated a lot of time to his education. He recounted how his grandma came for him from the village, which did not have many educational opportunities, to put him in a better school in the city. The switch gave him an excellent educational foundation which he believes grounded him to be a good student to date:

> My grand mum, though she didn't complete her primary school, she is good at Math. She will sit me down and take me through, especially multiplication. So, I picked up gradually. I think my grandma felt she would have done a lot more if she had had enough education. She didn't want us to be in her situation so; she was so much on "you need to go to school" and all that. She takes everything about education so seriously. You can see her up, praying for me to excel in my education all the time. Because of that, I just wanted to excel to see her happy. (Eli, Interview, 10/14/17).

Similar to Eli, Kanye reported that his mother's reaction each time he excelled in school made him know how much she valued education and always made him work hard he recounted:

> Growing up, what got me excited about my education was my mum, she is the reason I kept going to school because of the way she made a big deal out of my educational

> achievements especially anytime I will bring an award home. She will cry and get all emotional about how happy she was and how I will be a prominent person in the future. Also, growing up, I had friends who were always learning, always reading books and other academic material. My mother sold roasted plantains at the compound of a university campus, so I saw varsity graduates every year, and I yearned to be like them. (Kanye, Interview, 10/30/17).

Fee recalled how her mum was 'education centered' and would rather tolerate her not being serious with anything else but her education. She explained how her mum valued education and saw the potential a good education could give her and her younger sister because her mum was also exposed to a good education when she was growing up but had to drop out when she became pregnant with Fee at an early age. As a result, her mum could not achieve her educational dreams—a dream she now expects Fee and her younger sister to accomplish. Fee explains:

> I have been privileged enough to attend excellent schools for my primary education because my parents are focused on schooling. One thing I give thanks for is that my mum is education-centered, my mum is a brilliant woman. She comes from a wealthy family, but after my grandparents died, some siblings mishandled the family wealth, the inheritance issues. So, I don't know what happened; there was a mess along the way. Because my mum was from a good socioeconomic background, she went to good schools, but after high school, she met my dad and got pregnant so, she didn't get to continue her school, but her family was still there for her.

> One of the reasons why she pushes us is that she knows where she could have gotten to in life if she had continued with her education. She knows she would have done much better with her life; she thinks her potential is much more but believes she didn't get to her maximum with her life. So, she wants us to be able to do better than her because she tells us that our potential is extensive, so she makes sure that she gives us the best and for her, we can be celebrated through education. (Fee, Interview, 11/25/17).

Throughout their stories, participants also expressed the level of involvement of their parents and significant adults in their education through their participation in school meetings and activities although many of them did not understand the primary language used to communicate at many of the schools and school events, English, and sometimes felt intimidated. Regardless of the limited ability to understand and fully participate in school events due to language barriers, they still attended those events and remained involved. GMax, for instance, described a situation for his father. He mentioned, "My father was very involved, always, if there was PTA [Parent Teacher Association] meeting, he will always come although his English was limited" (GMax, Interview, 9/23/17).

Parents as Participants in the Educational Process

Many of the participants further mentioned that this display of commitment from their parents encouraged them to be serious during their early education and contributed significantly to how they both viewed and valued education throughout their first educational experiences. For John, his parents' involvement was evidenced by their active participation in school events and his parents' connection with his teachers. He explained:

> My parents didn't have any formal education, but they valued education. They knew the importance of education so, they tried from the little they had to give my sister and me outstanding education. They came to our school often to talk to the teachers to find out how we were doing, what we needed to be able to study to be successful. Every academic year they tried hard to get us the books and everything we needed for school. They tried to provide everything for us. They were very involved with our school; all the teachers knew them. (John, Interview, 1/24/17)

Education as a Collective Responsibility

While many of the participants mentioned that their parents bore the main responsibilities for their education especially when it came to financing their fees, they also attributed considerable support from family and community members, especially people who had some form of higher education than their direct parents, to their success. These external supports also came in the form of advice, encouragement to them and their parents, continued monitoring of their schoolwork and progress, providing material assistance like accommodation, and stepping in to play the role of parents in instances when the participants lost their immediate parents. Some of the participants viewed their early education and indeed their continuous educational achievements as the result of the collective effort of various significant adults present along their educational journey.

For Martin, the continuous pressure on his father from community members, resulting in his father sending him to secondary school to continue his education after Martin's primary education, secured his unceasing education. He explained, "When I graduated from Junior High School, people put a lot of pressure on my dad to take me to secondary school so the cocoa farm that he started, he sold it to pay my admission fees" (Martin, Interview, 10/15/17).

Eli highlighted that although his grandma was his lead advocate, his early education was a family project. His mum's family specifically contributed in multiple ways, including encouraging him to keep trying and striving for the very best when it comes to his education. He explained that although his family was not well-resourced financially, he received ample support like advice, books, school fees, little gifts, prayers and positive encouragement from his uncles, aunties, and other family members. He believes this support solidified his interest in education as he grew up. In his words, "My aunties and uncles will come together to contribute to buy my books, uniforms and support paying my school fees, so little by little, I passed class two, passed basic school, even passed JHS" (Eli, Interview, 10/14/17).

Similarly, Kanye and Evans recalled receiving support from members of their communities towards their educations. Evans, in particular, explained: "when I was in primary school, I had this friend whose dad liked me. He was the one who usually advised me and was like a role model to me when it comes to my education" (Evans, Interview 11/11/17).

Efua described the multiple ways various persons supported her education after the demise of her father before college and attributed her ability to continue her education primarily to these persons in her life:

> I lost my dad when I was in Junior High School. After my dad died, I went to live with my auntie, who saw me through high school. She provided for my food, school fees, and everything. Unfortunately, when I was moving to form two, she also died. But I had to make sure that I graduated. Fortunately, I was granted a scholarship in the school, which helped me to graduate. I graduated as the first BECE [Basic Certificate Examination] candidate in my school. My teachers picked up the responsibility for my care and

> contributed to my school fees. When I come to school, they bought me breakfast and all that. Also, I had a friend who lived in Kumasi where my SHS [Senior High School] was, she told her family about my condition so when school is on vacation I would go to her home, because it was challenging especially during vacation and midterm breaks to get money for transport fare back to school when I returned to Accra. Each time I come to Accra, I had to stay for like three weeks after we've resumed school before I can go to school because I couldn't find the money immediately for my transportation to school. My friend's mum was a nurse and had a pharmacy where we helped out. They didn't give us anything in terms of paying us, but when I am going back to school, she gives me something so that I can fend for myself. She also provided me money and provisions for the term. I also had a school mum whose family used to bring me stuff as well, like provisions and toiletries. (Efua, Interview, 11/25/17)

In her narrative above, Efua recounted four different persons who contributed to and supported her education. She mentioned her aunt, her friend, and her friend's family, her teachers, and her school mum. The pattern of multiple persons stepping in at various times to support the participants' education was pervasive across all the narratives of the early educational experiences of the participants. Kanye's story represented one of the most persuasive stories of the participants' early education as a collective community effort. In his story, he explained how his father was not involved in his life as a child but recounted how a grown-up family friend in the community invested time to always check on him and how he was doing in all aspects of his life, including his education. He also mentioned how a teacher who lived in their community for a long time made it

her responsibility to monitor his schoolwork to ensure that he was on track. Through the attention he received, Kanye reported that he owed it to them to excel and "not mess up." He recounted:

> I had a grown-up family friend who was always around, so I just could not mess around. He was the only role model I had at that time who was helping me with my books. He stayed quite far, but he tried to come around always to see how I was doing. He worked at the varsity as a library assistant, but he was always around. My daddy and I barely talked. We only speak when my fees are due, and I will go to him and say daddy here is my fees and he will always say there is no money. However, there was no say an intimate daddy and son relationship where we will sit down and talk, or me telling him about a problem I have at school and him helping me with how to go about resolving it. The only times I see him are sometimes on my way to school, I meet him on the way to school and say, daddy, good morning, and that is it. There was nothing like when you go to school learn hard, how is your assignment, how is school going, learn hard ok, nothing like that. For the family friend, I can talk to him about everything, and he will help me with advice and other things. So, it was the family friend, and our nearest longtime neighbor, a lady who was a well-respected teacher in the community who also monitored my performance at school and made sure I was doing well, so with the teacher and my family friend around I just couldn't mess around. I had no choice than to study hard. (Kanye, Interview, 10/30/17)

Similarly, Fee explained how other persons besides her mum contributed to her early education:

> My high school class teacher, I will never forget her. I don't even know how to describe her. She never let me stay home for more than two weeks when I'm sent home because I

> could not pay the fees. She will come to the house and say no, we will find a way to get you back to class. So, people like her in my life inspired me because at a point I wanted to give up. I was like I must as well go and help my mum in her business so that my younger sister can at least get the money and go to school. Then I can do some diploma or something along the line later. Also, the extended family, my mum's side, in particular, they've been entirely instrumental. I have an uncle who had a good job and everything, and he's always been there for us. He's been, my second father. He takes me to school, picks me up from school. And my mum has high blood pressure, so at times she is at the hospital, but in those moments when mum is away, he takes care of us. (Fee, Interview, 9/17/17)

The practice of the collective nature of child upbringing is a common phenomenon in many African societies where the participants in this study are located and take on different forms. For instance, in East Africa, this phenomenon is consistent with the concept of "Harambee" where communities collectively contribute to investing in a promising child's education and upkeep (Mbithi & Rasmusson, 1977). Similarly, Lloyd & Blanc (1996) have extensively researched this process of supporting academically promising children in Sub-Saharan Africa by the extended family especially when the child's immediate family is unable to take care of the financial needs of the family and can be seen in the African Adage like "it takes a village to raise a child."

Summary

Throughout their stories, participants alluded to the role their early experiences with education played in forming an integral part of how they perceived the greater importance of the role education played in their lives. Moreover, these early experiences provided the necessary foundation for their future college success. Significant to their early educational experiences were their exposure to formal education, parents and significant adults in their lives' attitudes towards

their education, and the assumed collective communal responsibility for their education of multiple members of their families and communities. Part I has offered the demographic and some broad emerging themes which were common across the participants stories of their experiences with early education, which situated the study in the context of the unique backgrounds of the participants. Part II will present the participants' conceptualization of *hustling* and subsequently show how they enacted *hustling* in and out of the classroom to attain college success.

PART II - Conceptualization and Performance of Hustle

College is experienced differently by different populations who gain access. These experiences sometimes significantly impact successful college completion or increase the chances for college dropout (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rankin &Reason, 2008). While these experiences vary for different populations of students, it is also known that students devise multiple strategies in response to their college experiences (Abrams, 201; Beegle, 2000; McLoughlin, 2011; Pizzolato, 2006). One such unexplored approach used by some students who are the first in their families to gain access to college and are also from a low-income background is the concept of *hustling.*

While the participants in this study used the word *hustling* continuously throughout their accounts to describe their educational experiences, there hasn't been any study in which the concept *hustling* has been identified as a navigational capacity used by students to direct their college experiences. Therefore, this study purposefully sought to understand how the participants conceptualized *hustling*. Hence I specifically asked them to describe what they meant when using the word *hustling*. In this section, I present the common thematic data emanating from the life story narratives of the participants about how they conceptualized *hustling* about their academic trajectory by using their experiences to describe their perceptions of the concept. Below are some of the shared themes that emerged from their responses.

Hustle as a Constant State of Struggle

Fifteen out of the 17 participants described *hustle* as a constant state of struggle to achieve their academic goals and make ends meet in other aspects of their wellbeing (food, clothing, shelter, and different basic needs). In this case, the students enact the definition of struggle as "to strive to achieve or attain something in the face of difficulty or resistance" (Oxford Dictionary).

Fee and Tawiah, for instance, described what immediately came to mind when they heard the word *hustling*. Tawiah highlights explicitly that "Whenever I hear that word what comes to mind is struggling, trying, or putting in extra effort to achieve something or to make it. It's about struggling and challenging yourself to achieve something" (Tawiah, Interview, 10/21/17).

Similarly, Fee explained:

> "When I think of hustling, struggling comes to mind. The word struggling automatically comes to mind. It's like trying hard to achieve something with obstacles along the way. So, the process of overcoming those obstacles is what I think of as hustling." (Fee, 26/11/17)

In both instances above, it was widespread for participants to use the word "struggle" to describe hustling. In that regard, Larson in particular elaborated:

> When I hear the phrase hustling, I see hawkers; I see head porters, I see people who struggle to make ends meet, I just see people who struggle to meet their objective compared to someone else achieving that objective without going through the same struggle. It is that whole process of having to work too hard to reach a goal. In the academic setting, two things come to mind from the way I see *hustling*; one is the difficulty in just trying to be in school and doing well in school, that's how I see it, difficulty in terms of finances, how finances hinder you from making academic progress. The other part is how difficult it is for you to understand and grapple with concepts and things taught in class because you have not been exposed, some people get it very easy, while it is taught, they get it because they have the foundation, but some people have to sit down and read and read and read, and they still don't get it, just because the foundation is very week, Those are the two

dimensions I will say I've experienced *hustling*. (Larson, Interview, 9/9/17)

In a similar breath of meeting one's set objectives, Andile, Martin, and John gave examples of how this struggle can mean setting a target, "forcing hard" and putting in the effort plus "whatever it takes" to meet the target even when the goal seems impossible. Andile explained:

> *Hustling,* to me is to push or force something to happen even when it looks like it is not possible. It is not finding reasons why you cannot do it but rather on the reasons why you can, even if there is no reason, you try to create one and focus on that one and move. In an academic environment, that means you focus on your educational goal, and you do everything that it takes to get to that goal. So right now, I am thinking of getting my degree, so I am focusing on it. And despite all the challenges and struggles that I am experiencing along the way, my goal is to end up getting the degree. So, I will have to keep going no matter what it takes. To me, it's all about forcing, knowing what you don't know, and finding ways to know them. (Andile, Interview, 10/14/17)

Martin offered a more contextually nuanced pronunciation of the word to suggest a very familiar knowledge of the term and explained;

> So, in our context, we don't even say hustling, we say "huzling." So *huzling* is trying hard to get what you need. No matter what it takes to get it, you have to do it to get it. It's a moral responsibility to make sure that you get it. It is the right thing you are doing, but whether it is difficult, whether you suffer, whether it takes sleepless nights to get it, you have to do it, it's a constant struggle. For example, in my case, some of my *huzling* is

> sometimes stopping school from going and working and then getting the money to take care of my school. Yes, that is the *huzling*. (Martin, Interview, 10/15/17)

To John, that struggle was connected to finding the needed resources to meet a set objective And often come with many sacrifices. He explained:

> What comes to mind is in a situation that all the resources you need to do or to achieve something aren't available. You have to sort of make it happen by sheer struggle and force, making a lot of sacrifices, denying yourself of instant gratification and working towards achieving that goal. Sometimes doing work that you usually don't want to do like hard work. Sometimes you just do it recognizing that this is the situation now and you just have to work hard to get to the position you want. (John, Interview, 1/24/18)

For Clive, this struggle meant putting in the effort to figure things out on your own because there is no one to help you figure it out. He explained:

> When I think of the word hustling, I think of struggling. Struggling to make things work on your own So when someone says I am hustling; it means they are struggling to get things done sometimes on their own with no help. (Clive, Interview, 10/26/17)

In all the examples above the participants gave different meanings, they associated with the word struggle which to them represented *hustle.*

Contingency Planning

To some, *hustling* meant having many alternatives to meet a need when one option is not enough or guaranteed to result in an expected or desired outcome. It meant merely sticking to one plan may not work for some participants due to uncertainties caused by several barriers. They viewed *hustling* as the innovation required to navigate the uncertainties and devise alternative plans as a back-up if one plan does not work. It also meant combining several actions to meet the desired goal because one action may not be enough. Some scholars consider this form of hustling as contingency planning (Johnson et al., 2005) GMax and Eli highlighted these multiple, innovative ways of planning:

> Hustling, to me, is an innovative term in the first place because a person who is hustling should always have alternatives for doing things. So, an example will be this; knowing that if I don't get a full scholarship, I can't move on with my choice of college, I look at other options and even with those others I have to look at ways with which I was going to fund myself. So, I planned to be open in the first place about my choice of college and work to find a school near my college where I can be teaching to support myself. So, for me, hustling is not having what you need, but finding other means to get what you need. You find the alternative, and you take it. (Eli, Interview 14/10/17)

GMax explained:

> When I hear hustling, I think of doubling your actions to manage several things at the same time. It's kind of juggling multiple things. In the college setting for me, academic hustling will be focusing on my academics to excel at the same time on income generation to complement the scholarship I receive for my upkeep to support and contribute to my

family. Figuring this out gives me the peace of mind to do well in my academics as well as manage relationships that are important to me like meeting my parents' expectations of me to help with the family needs. (GMax, Interview, 1/23/17)

From the themes above, the participants suggest that first of all, that *hustle* is a state of constant struggle, but one that is working toward achieving an end goal. Secondly, that *hustle* requires contingency planning because the world for the hustler is unpredictable and unpredictable futures require innovative planning for alternatives and for whatever is to come. Those who hustle have managed to do so. While the participants are describing these two concepts of hustle in the formal setting, it is consistent with Thieme's (2017) description of hustling in the informal unemployment setting where youths living in uncertainty and adversity struggle to get by and survive on the streets of Nairobi.

Performance of Hustling

In her work "The hustle economy; Informality, uncertainty and the geographies of getting by" Tatiana Thieme (2018) explained *hustle* as "an urban condition (the hustle), an action (to hustle) and an identity (to be a hustler) that evoke multiple forms of prosaic, industrious, and political labor: combining everyday survivalism and waiting, strategic diversification of income streams to mitigate risk." (p. 540). The sections above demonstrated that hustle could be both a rural and urban phenomenon. Participants in this study shown equally the industriousness and contingent planning found in Thieme's work, but also acknowledged the role of community and family as part of the hustle.

In the following sections, the performance of hustling will be examined. The first section exemplifies how *hustle* to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds is both a condition and

an action. The second section will demonstrate how participants in this study experienced the condition and action of hustle in their postsecondary educational setting.

Hustling as a result of socioeconomic background (Hustling as a condition and action)

For some of the participants, the unique circumstances and low socioeconomic conditions of their families propelled them to engage in various income-generating activities to support themselves through school and contribute to the daily upkeep of their families as well. They described the different activities they participated in and named them as their performance of *hustling*. Martin, for instance, described:

> In Junior High School, I started pounding *fufu*[11] for money to support me. I did this with a friend who was a bit older than me. The owner of the chop bar [local eatery] will give us food to eat and provide us with money when we are going to school. Pounding *fufu* was meant for big boys, but she wanted to cut cost, so she hired us. Through that, I got money to buy my books, and buy small, small things that I needed to get by. I pounded the fufu for three years: JHS1[12], JHS2, JHS3. Despite this hard work alongside schooling, I was first from class six, JHS1 JHS2 and JHS3 in my school, and I graduated from Junior High School with excellent results. So that was how I started life studying and working at the same time.
>
> When I got to SHS [Senior High School], it was difficult because sometimes, you go back to the house from the boarding school during vacation and there were no school fees. No one pays your boarding fees. It is not that they don't want to pay, but the money is not

[11] A starchy food made of ground cassava that is eaten with soup or stew.
[12] JHS= Junior High School

there. Sometimes you feel like you should stop school and just work. So sometimes I stop for about three to four weeks to go to the village and take somebody's farm to work on till I get some money and then go back to school to continue. So, I was just multi-tasking. By the time I got to form 3 in senior high school, I had raised enough money to buy my required books, and so I had books with me to continue with my studies anytime I went to the village to work. I will usually contact my friends to confirm topics treated in school to guide me, and I studied some of the topics by myself.

The teachers were not harsh on me anytime when I absented myself from school because they knew my financial situation, and besides, I performed well when I got the money to go back to school. I wrote my secondary school exams, and I passed. And then life became a bit easier for me because I had enough skills to teach and make some money from extra classes I conducted for people and did not have to pound the fufu or work on people's farms. I did that until I got the scholarship to go to college. (Martin, Interview, 10/15/17)

Martin's account of his hustling described both the condition of his parent's inability to pay for his school fees leading him to pound the fufu, work on people's farms and eventually work as a teacher to raise money to meet his financial need. Similarly, Jead explained how she had to forfeit the carefree freedoms of childhood so she could work and support her family at a very young age:

At a very early age, I had to go out of my way to find work. At the end of school each day you will expect children to go home, do their assignments and rest, but for me, it wasn't the same. I would leave school to find some work to do to get some money for my family,

and when I'm done, I also had to come and help with the chores at home and still find time for my books, that was part of my struggle.

So, I will give you an example; during primary school, around primary 6 and 7, I had to leave school, go to town and help sell bananas and other fruits, some of them from our farm some of them that my mum used to buy just for her business so that she can raise income to support and provide for us. So I would do that in town and afterward when I come home, well, we don't have water at home, so I end up, going all the way to get water, that's like a thirty minutes' walk from our home and help with the cooking and everything so before you realize it's like midnight, you have not really done your schoolwork, you are tired because of the work but with all the tiredness I will still sit down and do my schoolwork before I rest and wake up very early for school. That was my struggle before college. (Jead, Interview 9/23/17)

GMax, who had earlier explained that *hustling* was all about combining and negotiating multiple essential actions to ensure that set objectives are met, gave the following example of how he hustled during his early education to ensure that he met his daily aim of going to school and performing his house chores. In his narrative, he described both the conditions that compelled him to hustle as well as the actions to mitigate that condition. He described:

I have hustled a lot, but most of it has been farming. The norm in my community is that after your Junior High School you go to Kumasi, look for a source of income so that when you get admission to secondary school, you can pay for your school. I wrote the Basic Education Certificate Exams (BECE) in 2010. However, that year, we moved to a new

location. I was the only boy in the house at that time, so my father didn't allow me to go to Kumasi. I had to, by all means, find a way to make some income while I was at home so that when I get admission to secondary school, I could pay for my school.

I had to make some income, and that meant I had to farm more than I used to. I was able to do that because I wasn't going to school for the entire duration from April to August. I was in the house. I was helping on the family farm because that's where we eat. But I was also working on other people's private farms so that I could sell those things when I get admission. I did get admission, but unfortunately, at that time, the crops were not ready. We had to resort to an external source of income, and I think my father borrowed some money in advance to pay for my admission and when our crops got ready, and we harvested they sold them to go and repay the person. (GMax, Interviewed, 9/23/17)

Like GMax, Clive described his struggles to save money for college because his parents did not have the means to support him financially after senior high school despite all the various non-financial ways, they attempted to support his education. Like many of the participants, he identified and devised multiple income generation strategies in his community first for his upkeep and then to save towards his further education. He explained:

It has been difficult because my parents are not financially sound to see me through school. When I completed secondary school there wasn't any chance for me to just further my education at the university because there was no money at home, my parents just did not have it, even though they supported my education. So, I had to stay home for a year and then whiles I was at home I decided to join a microfinance company as a mobile banker,

so I did that for about three months. I wasn't very interested in that work because it wasn't very challenging and then I also had in mind that I will go to school, later on, so I wanted to do something that will help me to be reading and writing at the same time, so I decided to quit and find another job.

When I ended the mobile banking work, I applied for a teaching position in one of the private primary basic schools in the area, and I got the job, so I taught English in primary five and six. However, because I produced very good results, they saw a potential in me, so they sent me to the Junior High School (JHS) to teach Integrated Science in JHS two and three so I did that and while in that school I applied to the university. While I was teaching, I was also teaching part-time classes for some people. People in my community knew that I was a good student as a result of that they came around and gave me a lot of opportunities to teach their children and through that I got some income to sustain myself before I received the scholarship to the university. (Clive, Interview, 26/10/17)

Tawiah described *hustling* as "putting in extra efforts to achieve something, or struggling and challenging yourself to achieve something" described her performance of *hustle* through the various strategies she used to get access to textbooks for her schoolwork in high school and her work as a mobile banker to generate some income for her college education upon completing SHS. She, like the previous participants, also described the conditions which caused her to hustle and the various actions she took. She recalled:

Getting textbooks to even read for your classes was a *hustle* for me because getting money to buy them was difficult. I had to borrow textbooks from friends to use when they were

not using them. I remember in high school; my parents used to give me two cedis, fifty pesewas a day [$.50] for my upkeep when I go to school. And I had friends who were given fifteen cedis a day [$3]. I had to manage it every time. That's another hustle because you won't get what you want. You won't be satisfied with it, but you still have to manage it to make it in school.

After secondary school, I worked with a microfinance company at some point as a mobile banker. I did that work because when I completed senior high school, my parents did not have any money to help me to continue my education. So, I had to work to earn something for college. I went around on foot covering several kilometers every day to collect money from people then deposit at the bank at the end of the day to earn some commission at the end of the month for each deposit I made. So, I did that until I got the opportunity and scholarship to go to college. (Tawiah, Interview, 10/21/17)

Unlike many of the other participants, Fee gave a different account of sharing and then eventually transferring her identity as a *hustler* to her mother. Although she experienced many challenges in her academic journey, causing her family to *hustle* in various ways, her financial *hustle* was adopted by her mum. She shouldered their hardships and shielded Fee and Fee's sister to ensure that their education was not disrupted by the economic challenges her family faced. Fee recounts how her mum would obtain extra tuition while she [Fee's mum] figured out ways to find money to pay for their school fees when she and her sister were dismissed for nonpayment. Fee gratefully attributed her ability to progress through her education, especially at the early stage, to her mum and other relatives who took on her hustling identity and acted on her behalf. She recalled:

My mum is good at figuring things out; I don't think I have personally hustled before going to college, my mum did the hustling. I like to link it to my mum who hustled for me, not me. The people around me who hustled. She wouldn't even allow me to get a job during the break. She would rather wake us up early in the morning to go to the community library every morning while she looked for money to pay our fees when we were sent home for not paying our school fees. She gets cousins or friends coming to tutor me so when I went back to school, I was able to catch up with what I have learned. Because she will make sure I understood. Are you getting my point? It was like she was protecting us from the hustle. She took on the struggling for us.

Education for her was a huge priority, a huge, huge priority, so she will do whatever it took. For example, she worked as a telephone operator with a company in the industrial area. I also remember her engaging in businesses to get us through, so even if she had some jobs on the sides, she also made sure she did some businesses. At some point, she joined her sisters, and they were running a small soap business. At a point, she made soap in the house and sold it to the hospitals and staff who worked there. At another time I remember her getting maize from the villages and selling it to the mills to make it into flour. Another point she used to do porridge flour like the packs of porridge flour and get paper and glue, so we pack the flour and weigh it and sell it. She did all these things to keep us going. (Fee, Interview, 11/25/17)

Across their narratives, participants explained the various ways that their disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions contributed to their struggle and how they navigated these struggles.

They also explained that despite the non-financial support they received from their families towards their education, it didn't replace school fee payments and upkeep, resulting in engaging in all forms of work and devising strategies and actions to mitigate the risk of their education being curtailed.

While the lack of adequate funding for school and living played a crucial role in the struggle of many of the participants to remain in school, some also reported non-financial challenges they had to navigate as a result of their socioeconomic and sometimes cultural backgrounds. Many participants gave the example of navigating several difficulties which resulted in them being always late or sometimes totally absent from school and described that as a condition that pushed them to *hustle*. Evans, for instance, gave examples of how he traveled a long distance from home to school, often resulting in him being late for school, and engaging in house chores to support the family. Evans explained:

> I have hustled in many, many ways.
>
> An example would be struggling to combine academic goals alongside other house obligations. Like when you have to learn, yet some barriers are drawing you back from achieving your goals. So, for instance, the journey from home to school every morning. The stress that you go through the long flight, getting the transportation to school and back and the distance. You get to school, and you are already tired. Yet, you have to learn. I remember a time that I was a frequent late, late goer, I will say. It got to a time I was going to class late, but my teachers didn't care anymore because at the end of the day I will always figure out a way to study and pass my exams.

> In addition to all these hustling to go to school each day and perform well in my exams, all these difficulties trying to learn, you come back home you are tired, and I was also working at home. I cooked because my mum was always busy in town working to pay for our upkeep. She will come back around say 8 pm, and by the time she comes, I should have prepared food for whoever is at home. So, I go to school. I will go back, prepare food, wash the dishes eat, and still do my homework. Even though everything is not smooth; you don't have resources, you don't have all the time available but, yet you can achieve satisfactory academic results. (Evans, Interview, 11/11/17)

Similar to Evans, GMax also had to balance traveling a long distance from home to school with managing his responsibilities as a boy who kept the family livestock, which sometimes resulted in him missing school. He recounted:

> Going through school at the primary level was sometimes a challenge because you are in school, and you need to think about how the animals are feeding. During break time I had to go back to the house and give the animals water. We were two guys, one of my uncles and me. We would take turns looking after the cattle. I will do that for three days, and he will do for three days. In a week, I will not attend school for either two days or three days. That was it from primary one to JHS 3.

> The challenges were enormous, apart from the financial hustle, another hustle was finding the time to study. Because like I indicated earlier on, I had to look after cattle because that was the norm. The boys in the family look after the cattle. You can only attend school for a few numbers of days. Then on weekends, you have to go to the farm if you don't look

> after the cattle. No rest, when I get to go to school and come back home, I had to again go to the farm because from 2 pm when I close from school because I had to help my parents on the farm. I did that throughout my primary education, I had to do that. (GMax, Interview, 9/23/17)

Larson recalled his early school days when he had to walk several kilometers to a bus Stop, then scramble for a spot in a packed trotro (a privately-owned minibus taxi). Strangers would often make judgmental comments about his mother, calling her irresponsible for permitting her child to hustle his way into a trotro. "It makes you feel very hurt," Larson recalled, as he knew his family had little choice. Because he could not pay the student fare, Larson had to negotiate daily with strangers on the trotro to sit on their laps. As he got older, this negotiation got more humiliating, and the young man eventually worked out a deal with a trotro driver. In exchange for a ride to school, he tutored the driver's child every weekend. In Larson's narrative, hustling was in part the act of struggling his way into the trotro every day, but also his capacity to work out an informal agreement with the driver that allowed him a means to get to school.

Some participants also mentioned absenteeism as a significant challenging condition they had to navigate to remain in school. Absenteeism was directly connected to their inability to pay for the cost of school and often had to stay out of school to work to secure the needed funding. In addition to absenteeism, some participants explained that navigating their self-awareness of their socioeconomic status was a big struggle once they had to interact with their colleagues from more affluent backgrounds. They gave examples of how they had to navigate their identities as children from "poor families" [hustlers], especially in the presence of their peers. Andile further explained navigating her identity as a teenager from a "poor background," including the resulting

teasing and reactions from her friends. She highlighted how her boarding school classmates would always talk about her mum's appearance ("dressing") each time she visited and how she had to build the courage to accept who she was and let that motivate her to strive for success. She described those moments, saying:

> High school was tough because I found myself in a different class of people.
>
> Even though CAMFED came in and paid the fees and the other basics through a bursary scholarship, I still struggled. For example, since the school was a boarding school, during visiting days, parents will come, and they will be having a lot of good things for their children, even the way they dressed, their cars, everything and this is the time that your parents will also be visiting you, and they are just themselves, hahaha. That was a direct translation from my language. I don't know how to put it. Do you get it?
>
> So now you are faced with the situation where your parents are ordinary, and you know secondary school students at times, they like to tease each other, make fun of you and say, "did you see her mum when she came?" So that was another challenge. But the strategy was to accept who I was. This was me, and she is my mum. It's my family. I didn't choose to be born to this family, and neither did they choose to be born to the family that they are in. So that was how I overcame it. (Andile, Interview, 10/14/14)

For John and Sophia, losing both parents at a very early age created conditions that forced them to "grow up" and "figure things out" for themselves financially, emotionally, as well as socially and culturally. At times, societal and cultural practices also compounded their already severe conditions. John emphasized how he had to move from one home to another without having

anywhere to call home when his parents died and living at the mercy of strangers and benefactors who had "pity on him" at various points in times in his early life. He indicated that this condition characterized both his early life and college life. He further explained that although his financial aid covers all his needs when school is in session, he still does not have a place to return to that he can call "home" once school is on recess. Also, he described how he had to borrow books from his classmates and had to deprive himself of anything that was not extremely necessary in the hopes that denying himself to build his life would make him "better off" in the future. In explaining his experience and ways he *hustled* during his early education, he described the following:

> I would say I have *hustled* a lot, especially during junior high school. I haven't had all the things I needed to study and to learn and to grow as a normal child. When I was much younger in Nima before my parents died, I recall my friend and I will visit the library every Saturday. We would go and read, and we will go and play around with lots of things or sometimes we will take up painting lessons, with some artists and all that. I think looking at that period of my life at least I had the things I needed to learn and grow. As a child, I could learn, I could play. It was terrific. You go to school; you learn you come back you do your homework. Saturdays you go to the library. (John, Interview, 1/21/18)

While the loss of parents compounded the socioeconomic struggles of some of the participants, such loss also caused them significant emotional trauma and loneliness even when they can receive financial assistance from other family members and friends. Participants indicated that culturally such matters are not discussed and processed and as a result, leaves them with enormous trauma. Sophia's narrative in chapter four highlighted her going through intense loneliness when she had to deal with the loss of her mum. John also recounted not having a place

he can call home because he had to move from home to home with no one involving him in the decision-making process or talking to him about his parent's death. Such stories emphasized situations in which the family system and societal, cultural practices of the participants' home countries also contributed to their *hustle*. These practices highlight the sociocultural (in addition to economic) aspects of *hustle*.

Sociocultural Aspects of Hustle. Martin's story, like Sophia's, pointed to another cultural practice of families having many children in the Northern part of Ghana with the notion that the children become a workforce on their parents' farms. Martin pointed out that in many cases the anticipated benefit of having many children did not materialize financially, unfortunately causing the children to continue wallowing in the generational cycle of poverty and the conditions that bound them to the low socioeconomic status of their families if they [the children] did not "fight hard" to break away. He explained:

> For m, I see the problem from the beginning of our cultural practices. First of all, from the socio-economic background or the cultural standpoint. How we have programmed our mind in the Northern region is that if you have more children, you have something. My family, though my dad does not have money he has so many children, he believes God will take care of although he does not have enough financial resources to take care of the children personally. I see that to be a big problem because that can't sustain anyone. That's where the hustling starts from. The second is that parents think their children can make it in life on your own. Just imagine there are twelve children in my family, and we make about five hundred Ghana cedis [$100], realistically, how will my father take care of us? That starts the whole hustling because we then have to struggle to survive. (Martin, Interview, 10/15/17)

During their recollections of hustle in their early education, the participants in this study indicated multiple conditions that caused them to *hustle,* which were both financial and non-financial. They also showed various actions they took to respond to the conditions to push through their education with many of them suggesting that those experiences "toughened them up" for more future challenging and much harder struggles they encountered later in their lives and experiences in college.

In all cases, participants received scholarships because of their low-income status. This low-income status had ripple effects on their lives. Lack of money forced families into a constant state of hustle, with participants often taking on paid labor positions at young ages. Further, economic poverty predicted parents' appearance, which often led to teasing of participants. Finally, cultural practices such as ignoring orphan children or large families, according to participants, accentuated economic struggles. The next section presents the shared thematic narratives of the participants once they transitioned to college.

College experiences with hustling

Two sub-themes emerged from the major theme college experience with hustling that described how the participants experienced college and highlighted the ways they performed *hustling* to remain in college. The two themes will focus on their first-year transition, which all the participants identified as the most challenging condition. The second sub-theme will focus on how they negotiated their classroom and social adjustments, the multiple ways their experiences were impacted by their identities as first-generation and low-socioeconomic status students and how they compensated for what they lacked through the various actions they took. Both sub-themes

one and two will highlight the conditions that caused participants to *hustle* and will also highlight their action to mitigate those conditions.

First-year transition in college

While all the participants gained admission to college with very high secondary school scores that earned them their full scholarships, many of them reported their first-year transition to college as the most challenging period of their college experience and a "huge struggle" which caused them to *hustle*. Though some of the challenges they elaborated on were similar to what many first-year students would typically report experiencing, such as time management and adjusting to a new environment, the participants in this study made significant connections. Many attributed their difficult transition experiences to their socioeconomic backgrounds and how it impacted their academic and socioemotional transitions to college.

Some participants also reported experiencing significant challenges negotiating the unique liberal arts curriculum and teaching style. They noted unique features like substantial writing, math, programming, statistics, social theory, calculus, contributing to class discussions, and making compulsory presentations in class, yet they were not familiar with many of these aspects of education. Additionally, some of the participants complained that the classroom culture and examples given by some faculty did not relate to what they were familiar with, their experiences, and cultures which also brought them high anxiety and constant barriers they had to navigate. Again, the scenario described above demonstrated how the conditions one finds himself or herself in can influence the experience of hustle. Of all the participants, Kanye's account of his first-year experience was the most vivid embodiment and representation of the different struggles most of the participants narrated. He recounted:

As a scholarship student, I felt I represented my entire family, and this was my last chance to make life better for everyone who counted on me, and I did not have to mess this opportunity. That pressure got to me, and I wasn't performing well at all, especially in my first year. I wrote my first quiz, and I could feel the pressure. I knew the questions; I could do it. It was calculus, integration, and differentiation, but the tension, thinking back home, my family, the pressure not to fail them, I could not fail them. The pressure got to me, and I wrote thrash so for my first semester I wasn't on top of my game. I got C's and B's in my exams. In high school, my worst grade was a B, but in my first year, I got C's, B's and D's. I told myself that maybe I was not good enough, perhaps I was not worth the scholarship, the investment, and other things, so I felt my college made a mistake in admitting me. I met super intelligent students who spoke comfortably in class with excellent English and other things, and I thought I wasn't ready for this college because the environment and the climate were different, everything was different it was tough to fit it.

I remember we had to do a presentation for freshman year, that was one key moment in my freshman year. I will never forget, I was to give a presentation in five minutes. On the day of the presentation, I had prepared like never before. I went, and I could not give the presentation, I just went blank. I could not remember all the hours I had rehearsed my presentation and everything, and I failed in that presentation, which was my mid-semester exams. I told myself I couldn't do this. I think it was a question of self- esteem as at that time and also feeling like an impostor. I felt like I didn't belong, that the place was for the *shark* of the *sharks*, the extremely *sharks* [Shark is a local slang used for extremely intelligent students]. I was not good enough, this was not my environment so the first semester at college I went back home and they were excited to see me, but the fire that I

had passed through at school was too intense I could not connect with them I felt I had let them down.

In my second semester, I gathered the courage to begin again, I started writing excellent essays and other things then another thing happened. In one week, I had two informal resolutions, so I had to go to the AJC [Judicial Council for institution]. I went and apologized to the lecturer and told her I did not know how to cite correctly because I had never had to cite in high school and was willing to learn. I told her my story that if I got kicked out that will be the end of me, that school was my family's last chance out of poverty. I remember the lecturer saying to me, "maybe this is not the school for you; this is not the place for you." I felt hurt, thinking that oh, finally someone has told me that I honestly did not belong.

I was devastated, and at that time, I had no friends and other things, and I was struggling, and this lecturer confirmed to me that I did not belong there. Although I was hurt, I told myself that maybe that was the truth so perhaps I should accept it and move on or something but moving on to where? Cape Coast? I knew that I could not call back home and tell my mum about it. I could barely sleep during that time. I had no one to talk to about this AJC case or any other thing, that was the lowest point of it that I decided that if I was kicked out at the end of the case I will just jump down and end it. It was that bad, I was thinking of suicide and other things because this is my last shot at college education, and less than a year in, I was going to be sacked and kicked out, it doesn't make sense. I was like if I get sacked I will just in front of the career service office, I will just jump down and

> end it. I knew that I would not have it easy in college because I had little exposure, but I never thought it would be that hard.
>
> I finally started to recover during a summer program organized by my scholarship program. I got to make a lot of friends who shared similar experiences and challenges like me and were from the same background. They understood my experiences, so we bonded well, and I began to make friends. We share the same jokes and laugh about it unlike my roommates in the first year who could not get along with me because my jokes were from Cape Coast, their jokes are from Instagram, Twitter. (Kanye, Interview 10/30/17)

Kanye's experience represented the silent pressures conditions and responsibilities many of the participants in this study had to negotiate in their first year which according to them caused them great stress and sometimes resulting in their poor performance in the first year. His narrative also represented the significant capacity to navigate the many adversities both institutionally, like the comments passed by his instructor or not being familiar with a system of education he was familiar with, and by desiring not to disappoint the family that depended on him to change their narrative of poverty. While Kanye expressed high anxiety, feeling like an imposter who did not belong because of the institutional expectations, he also reported that the very same institution provided the environment for him to connect with "people like him" through his scholarship program. The program served as space where he finally developed relationships with and gained support from fellow scholarship recipients. As a result, he reported finally gaining the support, sense of belonging, and ability to managed to excel eventually.

Similar to Kanye, Habiba expressed her frustrations negotiating the curriculum during the first semester of her first year in her narrative in Chapter Four where she recounted how she failed

all but one of her courses in the first year except one course and her anxiety and fear dealing with the possibility of being sent home and the implications. Many of the other participants in this study exhibited great awareness of what they lacked and the actions they had to take to get help to prevent the risk of ending their college degree.

Their actions challenged the narrative surrounding FGLISs literature, which suggests that they often do not know how to ask for help and accept the role of a passive recipient of assistance to navigate the complex college environment. Many of the participants in this study demonstrated significant agency and capacity to act and figure out what needed to be done by reaching out to the relevant persons they believed could help them. For example, Anonymous, who eventually graduated with a CGPA of 3.68 in Computer Science, recounted:

> I hustled a lot, especially in my first year. Each time I raised my hand to speak in class, people will always laugh at me; I don't know why they always laugh, so presentations were exhausting for me. I don't know if it's because maybe I don't speak good English or perhaps if I talk my voice is funny, I don't know. I still haven't overcome that totally. The first few months programming class was something else; I think I didn't know what the man [white lecturer] was talking about he spoke so fast. When it comes to math, programming, and courses that use mathematics, and engineering courses, I do very well, but I struggle a lot in the writing courses.
>
> One experience I can't forget is my first presentation. I don't know why but I can't forget it. We were asked to describe something very dear to us, I couldn't figure out what was precious to me like an artifact or something and people were holding rings, mobiles phones, I just didn't know what was dear to me because that is not my life, so I had to make up

> something. I didn't prepare, I didn't even know how to prepare for it, so I went in front of the class I started speaking some few seconds my mind just went off. I couldn't remember anything, so I just stopped the presentation, I had a very low score for that class.
>
> So, I always read on how to do presentations, how to improve your self-esteem, public speaking in general and anything that will help me improve. I am now getting better because sometimes when people laugh at me in class I remember in my first year I could be down for like a week but right now, it can just happen, and in five minutes I forget about it. I believe I have improved a lot (Anonymous, Interview, 9/24/17).

Anonymous' hustle came in the form of self-education. He was placed in an unfamiliar environment, so quickly found written resources to help him navigate the novel expectations of his college.

Suzy also explained how she struggled in the first year and described how her background did not prepare her for the challenges she faced in her first year. However, her ability to "figure things out," helped her to develop creative strategies she later used to negotiate her struggles. She described:

> When I got the scholarship, it was like 'wow no more hustling.' But when I came yes, I was excited, but at the same time, I found myself in a different environment. I had to hustle to do well in my academics. I remember in the first year I was doing Calculus and that subject used to give me stress. Every time I am free, all I thought of was Calculus because I wasn't doing well, I had never done calculus before. That course was tough, but I know how to hustle. I got out of my comfort zone. I started befriending friends who were doing well.

When my lecturers share papers on quizzes and assignments, I always fished out those who got the highest. After class, I walked with them and ate lunch with them, and through that, I developed a sort of friendship and through that it was easier for me to approach them and find out how they did it and how I could improve. But later on, it wasn't sustainable because they also needed to study for the quizzes. I fought for myself and got out of my comfort zone. So, I started going to office hours. Yes, I was going for office hours although I was intimidated by my lectures. But through that kind of hustling, I was able to do well. I didn't fail the course.

I also hustled a lot with the writing course. I believe this is a result of my background. As I was growing up, my mum didn't expose me to reading books and all that, so I always struggled with writing good content, unlike my pretty strong classmates. They communicated the ideas properly, so it was so hard for me to participate in class sometimes. I had something to say but how to articulate it properly so that it looks like a valid point was always a problem. When I talk, my classmates packaged it so nicely and delivered it as if it's their point.

Also, like being from a humble background meant that my parents, my mum, couldn't take me to the top schools where the teacher are qualified and have the resources. Where teachers follow up: to have you do your homework and all that. So, it gave me a hard time being in my first year. I had to work extra hard compared to my other classmates who went to good schools. What saved me was that I know how to figure things out, so I worked extra hard. (Suzy, Interview, 1/23/17)

Suzy's hustle was an exercise in developing social capital. Yosso (2005) noted that low-income students do not often use social networks in the same way as privileged students, but engage in networking. In Suzy's case, finding successful students and tapping into their understanding of course content helped her in her first-year struggle. While almost all participants demonstrated a great deal of creativity in finding solutions for themselves before college to survive, they all indicated that the conditions at college forced them to ask for help, a skill they had to develop quickly.

Fee recounted how she had to learn how to ask for help after she failed a calculus class. While her main push was the fear of failure and the consequences after that, she also indicated that her background and the high expectations for her not excel forced her to learn to ask for help. According to Fee, the fear of failing was what made me continue to hustle. I kept telling myself I don't have the luxury to fail. She explains:

> For example, when doing group work, I sometimes have group members who can't be bothered about the work, so I end up doing most of the work. It was so hard and annoying; sometimes I wanted to give up, so we all fail. But when I think of my background, I am constantly reminded that I cannot afford to fail, I just didn't have the luxury to fail.

> If I stay in college one more year, it meant my mum struggling one more year; but the sooner I finish college, the sooner I could work and get to support her. Things like that pushed me to hustle and go the extra mile. I could not give up. I didn't have the luxury of going to sleep when everyone else was sleeping if I didn't understand something in class; it's not an option for me. I have to understand it whether I like it or not. If it meant going

for office hours and I used to discard the office hours in the beginning, but hard to quickly change that and go for office hours. Things like that pushed me to go the extra mile.

I have friends who, right from the beginning, if they decided to stop college, their parents will easily take them to any school abroad or anywhere else, and they will be fine. I have friends who failed Calculus, did PreCal 1 [Precalculus] and kept on failing. They left college, and they are in other schools, and they are fine. If it had happened to me, I will go and be farming. One of my classes Introduction to Finance I think in the first year. It has a lot of Math, a lot of Math and I hustled a lot at the time, most of them were particularly hard for me but I knew I couldn't fail because Introduction to Finance was a prerequisite for like five other courses. I couldn't afford to fail that. I remember going to see the lecturer. And I almost broke down in his office. He made me go to the FIs [Faculty Interns]. I used to have hours with the FIs every week. He gave me questions to work on. I go to FIs every single week. And then in class, some of my classmates who were well organized tutorial sessions. I used to attend every single tutorial. I practically lived in the library in that semester.

Students organized the tutorial sessions, so I had to learn to ask for help from my colleagues. What I have learned through my hustle is to ask for help and to be humble to accept and say it when I don't know something and be comfortable about it. I realized when I started doing that; I understood the content better. And I was doing better in class. Being able to ask for help is what is keeping me going. The pressure is that because I am on scholarship, people expect you to be smart and know all the answers, but yes, I am

intelligent but still learning (Fee, Interview, 25/11/17).

Fee's account reflects the significant transitional challenges many of the participants faced in their first year and the ways they activated their capacity to hustle to find solutions.

Institutional barriers

Students each hustled in their ways to make college work for them. Through self-teaching or utilizing resources (official and unofficial), they navigated through their coursework. However, at times, the institution itself created barriers for students, forcing the hustle to continue. For example, some participants expressed frustration with the kinds of examples used by their lecturers, which they felt were foreign to them. Participants mentioned that such references added to their isolation from the curriculum, consequently preventing them from engaging effectively in class discussions like their colleagues from more affluent and cosmopolitan backgrounds. They also indicated that such instances in the classroom contributed immensely to their stress and to their sense of not belonging. Kanye explained:

> I will say the nature of the classes over here was just different, you can barely read your notes and pass, group work counts, attendance counts, focus discussion, and we had to read American books and all that how can a village boy like me from my village background do all that? The gap is too broad. I remember once I had to analyze a hip-hop song; I was used to Castro [a local musical artist] then boom! I was asked to analyze Jay-Z's song. I did not know anything about Jay-Z, but the affluent students in my class knew who he was and his music, so I was lost. I feel here the local cultural element in the classroom is dead. I don't know Jay-Z, I have never listened to him anywhere, so I will feel the disconnect between the class content and the background of us like some of us the scholarship guys from the

village to be extensive. I think that incorporating diverse views to include those of us from the village in the classroom is missing.

I will say for some of the written courses the lecturers are not culturally aware that these student's backgrounds may affect their experiences and how they write in the classrooms because being taught and relating it to our reality is different. You know it, you can write, but the experience is not yours, you haven't experienced it so writing about it becomes a big challenge. (Kanye, Interview, 30/10/17)

Kanye's cultural exclusion was related to his access to global media and global pop culture. Efua lamented about a similar situation in her class in which the lecturer used examples which were not inclusive of her background. She described:

In my Supply Chain class, majority of the course were students who went to international schools or who have a rich background, so usually when the professor gives examples and wants the location wherever it is you get people mentioning the names. And it's like you are sitting down there alone wondering what you are doing in class. Most of the time, I asked what I was doing in the class and questioned how I didn't know those things. I will ask the other students in the class how they knew the answers, and they will tell me 'oh when I was small we used to go there.' So, it was intimidating because I felt I did not belong there. I just decided to be open minded, and when necessary, I probe more to find out more about that place. So, I decided I needed to read so much more and also listen to the morning news and other things so that I can get abreast with information. I couldn't contribute in class because I was so afraid that maybe it will be wrong, maybe people will

> know my ignorance and laugh at me. So usually I am reticent in class. Even if I know something and I see that the person sitting beside me doesn't know, I will instead tell the person the answer to say to the lecturer and they will get it right. I just did not have the confidence. (Efua, Interview, 11/25/17)

Despite the fact that the participants all hustled to make college work for them, almost all the participants in the study encountered one challenging condition with respect to the academic content, the liberal arts curriculum requirements, the writing classes, the programming classes, and the general pedagogical style which required students to participant fully in class. Of the 17 participants in this study, only GMax and Eli reported not having any challenges with their academic work. GMax, however, did not attribute his comfort and intelligence to being prepared by his high school or coming from a stable financial background but to the grace of God who had blessed him to be intelligent despite his socioeconomic and first-generation background. Additionally, he acknowledged and the training he received growing up when he had to study on his own in times after missing classes to help at home. He noted:

> Academically and in the classroom, I don't think I've hustled at all because of who I am. Let me clarify that. For me, I think that I have been privileged with the ability to understand things quickly. That has been a great blessing to me from God. Because of that in the classroom, I tend to get all this kind of respect and this kind of comfort with my professors and my classmates. I sort of control the class the way I want sometimes. People get amazed by my contributions in class. My experience growing up makes me study outside the classroom much more. I study a lot outside the classroom. (GMax, Interview, 09/23/17)

Similarly, Eli reported his confidence in his Calculus class earned him much respect amongst his peers and he then used that respect to "neutralize" his socioeconomic inadequacy. Eli stated: "for me, I thought of how to become relevant and not what I didn't have. I am very good at Calculus, so I taught my colleagues, and they always came to me as 'this smart guy,' so I was very relevant in my class" (Eli, Interview, 14/10/17).

Both Eli and GMax demonstrated a great deal of self-awareness of their intellectual currency and leveraged it to make up for their socioeconomic disadvantages. Their perspectives highlight that at times, hustle was not a constant condition. At times, Eli and GMax felt perfectly comfortable and did not have to engage in the struggle. For the other students, however, the day-to-day aspects of their college required that they enact hustle strategies to overcome new and unfamiliar expectations.

Non-academic and socioemotional hustling:

While many of the participants reported worrying about their academic transition when they first arrived in college, all 17 participants highlighted the various ways their socioeconomic backgrounds hindered their ability to engage fully and effectively outside the classroom compared to their peers from more affluent backgrounds. Participants reported that their lack of economic capital was an even greater hurdle to negotiation, unlike their intellectual capital, which was not dependent on their socioeconomic status.

Participants reported that their socioeconomic disadvantage affected four main areas of their engagement with campus life, namely "fitting in," their ability to make friends outside their social class, their involvements in extracurricular activities, and meeting their financial needs beyond what their scholarships provided for them. More than half of the participants (11) reported having very low self-esteem because of their socioeconomic backgrounds, resulting in their inability to make friends. Tawiah said that "One of the ways I struggled outside academics is being

able to approach people outside my social class to make friends with them. It is quite difficult for me" (Tawiah, Interview, 10/21/17).

Similarly, Habiba mentioned: "Amongst my year group, I felt that my self-esteem was very, very low because I was in class with all these rich people." Similarly, Kanye alluded in his narrative that outside the classroom, he found it hard to make friends outside the other scholarship students. He further explained that it was hard, especially if one was not part of other students' group or clan. Most of Kanye's friends were other scholarship recipients because he felt they understood him. While many of the participants expressed their frustrations about not being able to fit in because of their socioeconomic background, the international students in this study revealed an even greater feeling of isolation because of their double disadvantage of being foreign and low-income. Fee reported a struggle with being an international student in an entirely different environment where she did not have peers from the same high school, being in the same school with very affluent peers, not being financially compatible with them as well as her being ashamed of her socioeconomic background. She said:

> I struggled to embrace my background. I was shy of saying I am coming from such a background. I was happy and proud that I was on scholarship, but I came to school and realized the president's [of Ghana] son was in my class. This one's father is a minister in the government; this one's father is that. I wasn't prepared for that because throughout my life, I have attended middle-class schools for people who are struggling like even the rich ones at a point and me also struggled. But here, kids even drive different cars. The thought of even driving in a university has never crossed my mind. I know people drive, but it never crossed my mind that I will have colleagues who will be driving in school.

So, I wasn't comfortable talking about my poor family. I believe that contributed to me struggling to fit in socially and making friends. I didn't want people to get to know me, and where I came from, and that is the more reason, I didn't put in any effort to fit in because I was scared of people knowing I come from a financially challenged background. I sort of felt embarrassed. Additionally, I could not go out to socialize because when it comes to spending money and paying the bill if I pay, I have to limit myself for the rest of the semester because I did not have the money. So, I used to avoid myself going out with friends, especially outside my social class because of the cost involved. I don't know; I don't know. I just felt like you are here, and everyone is better than you.

Furthermore, many of my colleagues had friends from the same high school anyway, which made me not fit into their groups; they knew each other or had mutual friends. So it was easier for them to make friends. So, at first, I moved with only the Kenyans and other international students like me who were also on scholarship even though we went to different high schools, we had other things in common. Our scholarship status and we were all international students. It was much easier. (Fee, Interview, 9/17/17)

Like Fee, eight other participants added that they struggled because they did not have items like phones, brand name laptops, clothes, watches, and other things that their other affluent peers had. There were several students in this study like Fee who also struggled in various ways with the sudden realization of their lack of the wealth because of the diversity of students they interacted with once they arrived at college. Suzy noted that she encountered similar pressures as Fee. She associated the pressure with both peer pressure and a lack of funds for her daily needs and stated:

Another area I struggled with was financial hustling. I feel like when you get to college as a woman, you have different needs, and recent times I can't ask my mum to send me money to buy this pair of shoes and clothes and things like that to look like I am in college. That requires extra cash. As you grow up, you need to look like a woman and not a high school student. I believe in buying things for myself, not depending on a man to buy me things. So, yes it contributed to me hustling because I didn't want to ask my mum to send money, she didn't have to buy panties, send me money to buy shoes and so on.

My classmates, the ones from privileged backgrounds, they don't have to go through thinking how to get those things; their parents provide them— unlike us— who have to figure out how to get those things in addition to everything else. So, I found myself looking for extra hours to do my business, so I will be able to buy stuff for myself. I got to the open market to buy used shoes and come and sell them to my friends to get an extra income. That was my business, and that required spare time away from school.

The school environment also puts a lot of pressure on low-income students. Like looking at my friends who are also coming from similar backgrounds, I see they struggle to fit in and be accepted by the rich kids. I just feel its peer pressure. I know one of my friends was affected. She worked so hard to be what she wasn't, and through that she lost track of what brought her here. She wasn't doing her assignments. All she did was go and look for money, and that meant hanging out with men and all that so that she could get money, in the end, she was sacked. I chose not to do that because I have always been reflecting on my life and my journey. I know what I want to be and let me say I call it to love for myself

> and understanding myself and focusing on myself because what I believe is once I do well in my studies then it will work towards getting a good job. I would be able to get all those things. There is no rush. Also, it's step by step. You have to go through all these for you to get there. There is no need to rush. At the same time, I don't want to lose track of my academics because that is what brought me in in the first place. (Suzy, Interview, 01/23/17)

Some participants indicated that the lack of material belongings was an isolating social factor. The participants also reported lacking the knowledge it took to socialize with their colleagues from more privileged backgrounds which further segregated the scholarship students from others because they did not have the material and financial ability to engage in activities which helped develop new friendships and fit in. Andile captured this factor in her narrative, stating:

> Outside the classroom, most of the hassles came in the first year. I will say it was hard to socialize because you are not up to date with what others are even talking about. Let me say there is this exciting movie, and everyone is talking about it and have been watching it for the past three say months, but you don't know it. You have no access to it because of your background. Apart from the material things, many of us lacked the knowledge that would make you fit into the social discussions that appear here. You are new to social media; you don't know about Twitter and all. The kind of knowledge that you have can't fit into what others are talking about around you, so you find yourself an outlier. So, it was a struggle in material things and kind of knowledge that I had, which was limited to things in my social class. (Andile, Interview, 10/14/17)

Tawiah also reported not having clothing for presentations and reported encountering an awkward situation with her roommates during her first year in which she recounts:

> In the first year, I had to do a presentation for my Written and Oral class, and we had to wear formal attire. When I was coming to college, I didn't know anything about wearing formal wear because I didn't have anyone to tell me that oh when you are coming to school, bring formal attire and all that. I didn't come with any. I wore an attire and my roommates started talking and laughing at me and said I was disgracing the room with the dress I was wearing to the presentation. I, however, didn't have the money to buy any formal clothing. In the end, I wore a church dress, and my roommates were not happy. (Tawiah, Interview, 21/10/17)

Throughout their narratives, participants mentioned not possessing the "way of life" of their peers, which they perceived put them ahead of them. The participant further explained how their lack of understanding of the "ways" of their colleagues often isolated them because unlike their peers, they struggled and sometimes were unable to understand how the "system" worked which slowed them down. This particular assertion by the participants is in line with the notion of cultural capital and how people from the dominant culture use it to gain access and reap benefits.

Kincheloe (2008) defines cultural capital as the ways through which "members in the dominant culture affords individuals ways of knowing, acting and being that can be 'cashed in' to get ahead in the lived world" (p.110). In its simplest explanation, cultural capital is the institutionalized acceptable norms, codes, and assessment which are heavily

determined by those in the upper and middle class which they pass on to their children to put them ahead. Thus, although culture is possessed by the sociability of the social class, it is the institutional evaluative norm, which gives it legitimacy. In the particular case of Tawiah, for instance, this legitimacy came from her peer's determination of what is acceptable when making presentations which were foreign to her.

Walpole (2003) further asserts that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds might not have prior socialization related to active learning practices and habits such us doing presentation, speaking up in class, being assertive and dressing up for presentations, which is contrary to students from high and middle-class and high socioeconomic backgrounds. Such students are socialized to engage in these activities as part of their upbringing, hence increasing the likelihood of them doing same once they get to college. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), however, add that children from lower class families acquire these ways of being through schooling - which many of the participants in this study reported doing through careful observation of their peers and spending more time to learn these behaviors.

Exclusion, responsibility, and hustle

Other participants also reported of different ways in which their socioeconomic backgrounds affected them beyond struggling to fit in, making new friends, and being accepted. The most significant and most prominent issue was the burden of the sudden privileges they enjoyed as a result of their scholarships in comparison to their reality of coming from struggling families who still lived in poverty. Evans reported feeling guilty for all the benefits he received from his scholarship, knowing that his family back home had real financial needs:

Before college, I was earning a hundred cedis [$20] a month for teaching, and I managed

with that money the whole month for my upkeep and helping in the house. Suddenly, I came to college, and my scholarship allowed me to spend like a hundred cedis in a week just for food. So, I felt comfortable. But whenever I went home, I felt like it was not the same at home. I was enjoying like twenty cedis a day at school, but conditions at home were not right, so I was thinking about home all the time, especially whenever I'm spending money. That was a big issue for me, trying to concentrate on my life because I felt like I was living a different life in school because of the opportunity I had with the scholarship, I always felt guilty which affected my academics. So, whenever I was buying something, and I look at the price, I feel guilty. (Evans, Interview, 11/11/17)

Evans later added that he would buy food, keep it, and send home over the weekend, so his family would also benefit, and through that, he managed his guilt to some extent. Like Evans, GMax also reported remitting his family from his scholarship stipend to take care of some of the financial needs in the house. He recounted:

I will say hustling still exists even at college despite the fact that I am on a full financial aid which takes care of all my school need. In a very subtle form, I still experience hustling but not like when I was in high school because now, I get a monthly stipend because of my scholarship and all my financial needs in relation to my education is taken care of by my scholarship. However, because of my background when I get the stipend, it is not just for me. It is for my younger siblings and me because I know how my parents have been like. Like I indicated my younger sister, the one who comes after me is in secondary school right now. Last year, for instance, when she got the admission to secondary school, my parents had to pay a hundred cedis, and the money wasn't readily available. Most of it came from

my stipend. Then for the rest of the semester, I had to manage with whatever little was left. (GMax, Interview, 09/23/17)

The participants in this study also reported on the multiple ways their socioeconomic backgrounds influenced their decision to join (or not to join) "non-academic" related extracurricular activities. Many of the participants reported working hard and keeping their focus to stay in good academic standing to meet their educational goals, which was mostly to graduate in good academic standing and on time and to be in a better position to transform themselves and their communities. Consequently, some of the participants struggled to engage in other non-academic related extracurricular activities which they perceived would take them away from their studies. GMax recounted:

> When you are in school, there is much more to course work. You need to focus especially on building your social relations in college. You need to develop yourself holistically, but when you are from a background like mine, you need to balance the extent to which you engage in those things, it is difficult.
>
> Do you focus on only your academics all the time to do well in school and not be sent home? Do you focus on only your academics and extracurricular activities? To which extent do you balance this? Because in the likelihood that I don't get the required GPA to stay in school that's that for me. I will have to go back to the house and start from scratch.
>
> That made me to, in a way, reduce my extracurricular activities a lot and focus on my

academic work because I know that's the only way that will sustain me in school. Sometimes it is not a particularly fulfilling thing because it's essential to do more than academics, but I feel constrained.

While engaging outside their academic was a significant challenge for reasons as expressed by GMax, it is essential to state that many of the participants were involved in several community engagement projects which were related in their areas of studies like teaching computer science or math to children from vulnerable backgrounds in primary schools in the community where the university is situated.

Hustling and giving back

Almost all participants mentioned the importance of giving back to the community what they had received as scholarship beneficiaries. This commitment to give back to their communities led them to engage in one extracurricular activity or the other ranging from various social ventures, teaching in the local primary schools (five participants), running sanitation education programs in the village community where their college was located (four participants), conducting after-school homework clinics designed for underprivileged girls in the local primary schools near the university (seven participants). Two participants ran and won the student government president and vice positions in their Junior year.

GMax captured this culture of giving back very eloquently in his narrative when he highlighted: "right before I got to college the responsibility to give back and impact others was imbedded in me. In my culture, it's a big thing to give value to things that have been given to you. The elders always say unto those much has been given much is expected."

(GMax, Interview, 9/23/17)

For most of their out of the classroom and non-academic struggles, participants reported continually reminding themselves of their purpose and responsibilities they carried to get themselves and their families out of the cycle of poverty. They reminded themselves of how far they had come despite the many challenges they had faced in their lives and accepting who they were with the conviction that their struggles were for the moment and holding on to the hope that if they stayed focused, they would be successful. Martin, for instance, suggested:

> Sometimes you feel like this hustle is too difficult, but you also ask yourself, what have you been through before? Does this measure up to that one? Is it more difficult than what you have done before? So actually, you can do anything. You just have to remind yourself that you have done more than that before." (Martin, Interview, 10/15/17)

For Tawiah, being the first born in her family inspired her to be an example to her younger sibling, whom she believed looked up to her. Therefore, she had to put her best foot forward in everything she did, no matter how difficult it was. According to Tawiah, "what inspires me is that I am the first born; my siblings are looking up to me so every time I have to put up my best in everything that I do" (Tawiah, Interview, 10/31/17). Similarly, Suzy mentioned always making the right choices to not let her family, especially her younger brother and mum, down:

> Beyond myself, I didn't want to let my family down. I didn't want to come all the way then go back empty-handed. My mum believes in me and sees me as a big hero. I also have a small brother who looks up to me so I can't just give up or choose the wrong path. What will he be looking up to? I don't want to choose the wrong way because it has consequences that will affect my entire family (Suzy, Interview, 01/23/17).

Participants reported that the multiple sense of responsibility they had towards their families, especially their younger siblings and members of their communities motivated to keep on pushing through the challenges they faced. According to them, they had to succeed in other to motivate and inspire others like them that they could also do same and in some cases, they needed to be in a good economic position to enable them to support their immediate and distant families who depended on them.

Throughout their stories, participants shared the institutional, environmental, and personal stories that shaped their experiences in college. Participants indicated that their struggling and challenging experiences in and out of the classroom caused them to always play catch-up, feel inadequate, experience intense fear of failure and extreme vulnerability and feeling like imposters who did not belong. They further explained that while the conditions above significantly impeded their smooth college transition, and, in many, ways slowed their success especially in their first year of college compared to their more exposed peers from affluent backgrounds.

The same conditions also pushed them to go the extra mile to devise and adopt several navigational strategies to help them figure out ways to overcome the struggles and excel despite their difficult start. For them, the multiple strategies they adopted constituted their enactment of *hustling* in its practical terms. The final section in this chapter will carefully examine the various ways participants in this study defined *success*, connecting the different ways they had hustled to their college success.

PART III – Hustling and Success

Every participant in this study reflected the characteristics of students who are traditionally perceived as lacking the cultural capital, academic preparedness, resilience and persistence it takes to succeed in college leading such students having a low college completion rate which is a crucial measure of college success for students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds

(Adelman, 1999; Bui, 2002; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Perna, 2005b; Thayer, 2000; Tinto 2006; Walpole, 2011). While the accounts of the various forms of *hustling* in this study showed almost all the characteristics generally posited by first-generation college student literature to result in their attrition (Perna, 2005b; Thayer, 2000; Tinto 2006), all participants not only thrived but also demonstrated significant resilience, persistence and tremendous "know how," which they termed "hustling," to attain high academic achievement (with a range of CGPA of 3.05/4.00 to 3.94/4.00) and college success.

This final section in the chapter will answer the study's last research question which sought to understand how the participants imagined their college success and the unique dispositions they possessed resulting from their hustle that contributed to their success. The section is structured in two parts. The first part presents the emerging themes from the participants' narratives about how they imagined their college success in connection to their *hustle*. The second part will continue to map out common dispositions and traits the participants in the study developed over time and deployed in various circumstances to attain success. I will then conclude with a chapter summary.

College Success

For this study, academic success was defined as students in good academic standing towards their college completion. Students at this university required a CGPA of 2.50/4.00 or better to graduate. This criterion was further raised to 3.00 /4.00 or better for selection of the participants for the study; however, the participants held a much broader conceptualization of their college success. Two broad themes emerged from the participants' narratives about what their college success meant to them. The first was the concept of "personal growth and transformation," and the second was "transformation of family and "others."

Personal growth and transformation

To some of the participants, this growth meant being able to set their educational goals and doing whatever it took to be on track to accomplish those goals. Kanye explained: "I feel I have grown, I have experienced a lot of things that I wouldn't have experienced in my village in Cape Coast, I have learned a lot and matured and most importantly, will be able to graduate which was my main goal of coming to college." Evans, who had a CGPA of 3.64/ 4.00 at the time of the interview and was managing an award-winning social enterprise project on sanitation on campus with the help of his colleagues as employees, also explained:

> My college success has been a journey of growth that has shaped me to be more tough or robust and energetic to work hard in any role that I am placed in so that I can give an excellent input in any organization that I join. If I can get a good job in an organization in the future set up my own business, I feel like that will be a real success to me and not just getting a high GPA. My hustle has made me stronger.
>
> It has made me understand the realities of life. It made me understand that in every situation I can endure. It makes me feel proud, and it makes me feel like I can stand any obstacle that comes my way. In case if I feel like I have been very successful, I still believe I can face barriers in different forms. It might not be financial, it might not be academic but various obstacles in life, and I feel that I will be able to achieve anything. That is what success means to me. (Evans, Interview 11/11/17)

While he hoped to be employed, Evans indicated that his ability to gain life experiences and build his endurance to survive obstacles, contribute positively to any organization and have his own business in future was what made him successful. Similarly, Jead defined college success

by her transformation, although she had continuously been on the Dean's list for academic excellence. She believed this was important because it prepared her to fit in better in any formal employment she would eventually take on. She explained:

> Well my college success is not mainly about the academic grades, but I will define it in a way that I have been able to change into a different person, I was a shy and not an outgoing person, but with time I have been able to change. I can see the transition I have gone through I can speak in front of people, raise my ideas, and get people to come on board, I am also able to talk in class and amongst people. Talking in class was something I could not do when I first got to college. Talking in class especially in the first year was not good because I also used to fear that people will say they don't understand my accent I felt intimidated but with time I have changed, and I can now easily express myself in public. I believe all these skills will better position me to be successful than just gaining academic grades. (Jead, Interview, 9/23/17)

Likewise, Andile stated: "College success is not just about the degree, but about understanding myself better, getting the skills it takes to improve my life, improve the lives of the people around me and the lives of the people in my community and to make a difference." Associating their college success to their personal growth and transformation was a prevalent theme across the participant's stories. While they recognized the importance of having the needed grades to remain in college and qualify to graduate, many of the participants reported that having good grades alone was not enough, but the grades must also be complemented with personal growth and transformation.

The participants' accounts of their college success noted gaining the kind of skills they did not have before college such as having self-confidence, being able to speak and present their ideas to a group to get their support, contributing meaningfully in conversations and gaining knowledge content of the various subject areas they were studying. They believed these skills would enhance their ability to be independent and have a more stable life since they generally envision their education, providing more opportunities to gain meaningful and more financially viable lives.

Transformation of family and others

The second lens through which the participants viewed their college success was their ability to use their college education to contribute to transforming their families, "people like them," and their communities. Thus, many participants believed that the benefits of having the skills to do what they termed "meaningful work" and not "hustle work."

As seen throughout this study, participants expressed enormous responsibilities to bring their families out of poverty using their college education but, most importantly, all participants envisioned a much bigger responsibility to their communities because they believed that many people contributed to their college success beyond their efforts. GMax captured this sentiment in his narrative when he explained what success meant to him. He recounted:

> Success is a huge and complicated thing, and it can hardly be attributed to one single aspect of your life. For instance, if my father had removed me from school, then all my hard work would have been in vain, so my parents' support is part of this success, and they must benefit. If I got to high school and all these teachers that I always speak to taught me otherwise, I could have turned out to be something else. I need to make them proud by passing on what I have received hence my motivation to be a lecturer. Again, if the scholarship program had not awarded me the funds for my college, I would not have gained access, and we wouldn't be talking about this success in the first place, so I owe it to them

> as well. It's a culmination of the many efforts by several people and events so they must all benefit. Thus, success to me is all about how I can also make the maximum impact to meet all these multiple investments in me and also transform other people's lives like they did mine. (GMax, Interview, 9/23/17)

GMax's reflection on his college success mirrored the collective lens through which most of the participants in this study viewed their college success. Although they individually did the hard work of *hustling* when necessary, especially throughout their college experience, they personally saw themselves as representing a much bigger purpose than themselves. They, therefore, saw their college success as being able first to transform themselves as indicated in the previous section and also to transform their families and communities who had also invested in their thriving. The participants expressed this multi-layered nature of success in many accounts of their college success throughout their narratives.

Beyond proving their capabilities to be significant members of their families and communities, many of the participants also reported using their newly acquired status as "educated" to shift cultural mindsets and practices which to them contributed to the intergenerational poverty in their families and communities. Martin earlier lamented the cultural practice in Northern Ghana where people intentionally have many children to help on their farms although Martin believed that this belief never materializes, and parents were never able to take care of their children. Martin believed that completing college will accord him the respect needed for members in his village community to listen to him when he talked about stopping such practices. He also believed his education would enable him to get a job to make money and also

help his community in a more sustainable way like improved farming methods since they were already farmers. He explained:

> I have so many ideas on my mind about how we are going to tackle the cultural issues in my community. How we can let people understand that it is not just about giving birth, it is not just about quantity. It is not just about having children and trusting that God will take care of them. When I graduate and go back to some of my people now listen to me when I talk because now, I would be educated. They will give me the ears for what I have to say. My success comes from getting some kind of attention from my people to listen to me when I talk and shifting their mindset to use more productive ways in their farms beyond having more children. I also now can work to get money regularly to sustain myself and bring some change in my community. That's how I see my success. (Martin, Interview, 10/15/17)

For John, success is simply being able to make progress in life. He believes for people like him; they always live under pressure because the stakes are always high to feed, clothe, and find shelter which leaves them no room to advance. He believes that college will lift this constant burden on him and allow him also to help people like him. He reported:

> My success is vital because it is hard to remain in a standstill situation when you are just not progressing. It is better to be in a much-improved condition because if you wake up in the morning and you wouldn't have to worry about how to find food and other necessities, you can spend much more time doing something productive like learning new skills. That is the situation for people like me from poor background, so it's essential I succeed so I can contribute to this change of circumstance. (John, Interview, 01/24/17)

Finally, many of the participants viewed success as living a life free of poverty and strife, to be a better example as hope to others who have the same life experiences as you. Habiba and Sophia expressed this meaning of their stories. Sophia said:

> My academic success means a lot to me because I want to be different. In the family, no one has a career. People are just doing small things to make ends meet. But I want to be the one that has a career and be able to stand up and motivate my family and community. For now, they are hopeless. I want to be the one that everyone would look up to. For me it will be what success means to me. (Sophia, Interview, 10/21/17)

Habiba explained what her college success meant to her and highlighted:

> I will say that my success was not easy. I had to do a lot of work before getting it, so I know what it is like to come from a background like mine and always want to help people like me. There was this first-year girl used always to cry because she just could not figure things out. She always reminded me of when I was in the first year. So, I went to her, and she told me that she didn't understand anything. I became friends with her and spoke to her and told her all the things I went through when I was in the first year, and I opened my focus to show her (my) bad grades in my first year. Anytime she does work, she will bring it to me, and I would help her with the editing and everything. When she got to the second year, she told me that even though the second year was hard, any time she remembers m, then she knows that she can do it. I feel that my personal experience has been able to motivate someone to be able to do it. To me, that is what success is all about, not about GPA. It is about using what you have achieved to make other people's lives better.

> Right now, I am working with the high school in the village in the Math Project to help the students who don't have upbringing from parents who are educated. And I am working with Kaya Care [An educational center for the children of head porters popularly known as *Kayaye*] as well as doing my final year thesis to help improve the interventions for kayaye in our markets. So, success is something you achieve that would improve you and the people around you as well as people in your community. (Habiba, Interview, 9/23/17)

Similarly, Suzy recounted how she was relied upon by her mum to take leadership in guiding her younger siblings' education. She recalled:

> Since I began college, my mum consults me on everything. She feels like I am exposed enough to know about so many things. Like when my brother completed high school and preparing to join the university, my mum would say, "Oh, please talk to your brother and guide him. Make him smart like the way you are smart. Show him all the way. Show your brother the town; he needs to know the town." She allows me to handle my brother's business because she can't give him that sort of help to get the opportunity and all that. I was able to guide him and followed up until he got admitted to the university. I always asked; did you submit this? Have you checked your email? So, my success is contributing to him and my family. (Suzy, Interview, 1/23/17)

Development of Dispositions for Success

Throughout their experiences with *hustle* shared in their stories, participants developed and deployed multiple characteristics and dispositions over time through their familial, environmental, and personal educational pathways. These characteristics and dispositions served as sources of

motivation and strength, which participants activated each time; they encountered challenges to remind themselves of their capabilities and to fuel action to carry on.

Across their stories, participants demonstrated characteristics like deep respect for education through the various attitudes and commitments of their parents and significant adults in their lives towards their early education, ability to figure things out when faced with challenges, and the value and ability to set a goal and work hard to meet the goal. The participants contingency planned by combining multiple alternatives to find solutions and postponement of immediate gratification for future benefits through what they termed learning to "play the waiting game," and taking ownership of their lives at a very early age when many of them had to work to earn income to pay for their school fees and daily upkeep.

While the participants developed and learned these skills over time through their *hustle*— which culminated to their educational success in college— each participant additionally possessed unique traits that directly enhanced their college success. Across their stories, the following four unique characteristics stood out: i) Proactively connecting with others; ii) taking ownership of their education; iii) strong drive to prove their ability; and iv) collective optimism in the face of adversity. These characteristics were shared across the participant's narratives and were closely associated with contributing to the participant's eventual college success.

In the following sections, I elaborate on each of these traits and the various ways the participants demonstrated them in their stories. I also give a summary of the multiple ways the participants also communicated some of these traits through the advice they gave to students like them seeking college success and institutions and people who work with students like them.

Proactively Connecting with Others

All the participants in this study had parents who did not have a college degree, with some not having any form of education; however, each of the participants realized at a very early stage in their lives their parents' inability to support their education directly. As a result, the participants sought other members in their communities and schools who were educated and understood how school worked for guidance. Efua summed this up in her narrative when she said, "although my mum could not help me with my academic work, I knew of other people who were interested of my academic goals, so I always went to them for guidance and direction." While many of the participants mentioned identifying and going to these persons in their communities and schools, they also mentioned other protective adults who took an interest in their education, to whom they felt accountable to and to whom they went to for advice when it came to their academic work. For Kanye, these were the parents of their friends and other community members who were also teachers. In his earlier narrative, Kanye mentioned the family friend and the community teacher to whom he reported his school progress as guides for advice and mentoring.

Also, each participant in this study, except Fee who mentioned her mum not allowing them to work, took steps to embark on multiple forms of low-paying work to compensate for their parents' inability to either pay for their fees or supplement the family income. Examples of work ranged from pounding fufu in chop bars to working as head porters to taking on the farming job and selling or manner of foodstuff. Efua mentioned such work in her narrative:

> My mum is a peasant farmer. She doesn't give us anything towards our education or upkeep apart from some of the foodstuffs she cultivates from the farm. All four siblings are responsible for providing financial help to both my mum and younger brother. I take care of my brother's school expenses. Sometimes, my older siblings also ask for financial

> assistance from me, even though I am younger, so I sell pure water at the bus stations, cook Indome [spaghetti] at the roadside to pay for all that. At some point when my mum left us for the village, I was also responsible for paying the rent and bills in the compound house where we lived. (Efua, Interview, 11/25/17)

All the participants also demonstrated several help-seeking traits when they encountered challenges with their schoolwork. This help-seeking came about as a result of either failing a course or struggling to understand concepts and classwork, especially in the first year. Habiba mentioned seeking help from her academic adviser and faculty interns as well as the Dean of Students. Fee said learning to go for office hours and tutorial sessions organized by her colleagues. Lastly, Andile mentioned looking out for her colleagues who scored high on various quizzes and befriending them so that they can help her. Many participants also said using additional resources like YouTube and videos to complement the lecture notes and materials used in class. These traits were demonstrated by the participants throughout this study when they communicated the various ways, they performed hustling in and out of the classroom. Evans, Clive, and John also mentioned taking advantage of the numerous resources and opportunities available at the institution. Clive, for instance, emphasized why it was essential to access these resources without being told or forced to do so. He stated:

> There are a lot of programs and opportunities here at the university, but if you don't exploit it or you don't make steps towards it, you will not get it, you always have to take the steps, and make conscious efforts to be able actually to get it. For instance, last summer, there was a program in South Africa, which I applied and obtained. The opportunities here are plenty, from the Career Services to the ODIP [Office of Diversity

and International Programs] so when you push yourself, you will be able actually to take hold of these opportunities. Also, in terms of academic support, there are people around you can go to for help. You don't have to do everything by yourself; there are people around that you can resort to whenever you face challenges. Some people are very good with numbers, others are good with writing, so you can approach these people and then ask, I don't know, very lovely people exist here, and I appreciate that. Even if they are busy, they will make time for you when you go to them. (Clive, Interview, 10/26/2017)

Taking Ownership of Their Education

Participants also demonstrated taking ownership of their learning at a very early age through the various tasks and obligations they had to combine with their schoolwork. In talking about how he hustled before college, GMax mentioned how he had to take care of the family livestock, which caused him to miss school for two days each week. He explained that during these times, he would take notes from his school friends and study on his while on the farm. In their earlier narratives, Larson, Martin, Evans, and John mentioned walking very long distances to get to school and continuously arriving late to school but always managing to make up for whatever they missed and doing very well in their exams.

In Larson's earlier narrative where he recounted begging older passengers to sit on their laps for a ride to school, hustling was in part the act of struggling his way into the *trotro* every day, but also his capacity to work out an informal agreement with the driver that allowed him a means to get to school. In doing that, he took charge of his education by ensuring that he did whatever it took to get to school every day when he realized that his mum could not afford the bus fare.

Jead mentioned sacrificing her childhood freedoms to do house chores like walking long distances after school to fetch water for the house while still finding time to complete her school

assignments in the middle of the night so she could submit them the following day. For Anonymous, taking ownership of his learning meant driving all decisions concerning his education without input from his mum, who only provided him with the money and other resources he needed for school. He recounted:

> Throughout my educational process, I have been actively involved in it. All the schools I went so I decided to go there. I went there for the admission. I paid the school fees. I only ask my mum for the money, and she gives it to me, but my dad doesn't know anything at all about my education, till now I don't think he knows that I am even at the university. All the schools or all the courses I have selected throughout my education have solely been my decision. If you also ask my parents, the course I am doing at the University; I don't think they will know. Coming to this University, I was fortunate to have had a friend who stayed in Accra, so I picked a car then told my mum that I was coming for the interview. She helped me with some money and savings that I have done during my short period of work at senior high, so I combined everything, and I came. (Anonymous, Interview, 09/27/17)

For Habiba, she had to take charge of her learning and education because although her parents supported her by putting her in school, they did not understand how the school worked so she had to figure things out by herself and motivate herself:

> In my family, I am the first born with two siblings, a boy and a girl. Growing up, I had to drive myself when it comes to my schoolwork because my father and my mum are not educated. Even when I bring my homework, no one is there to guide me to do it, or even force me to go and do my homework. I had to sit down and do it myself. I did everything

by myself. Even my report card, if they take it, they won't even know whether I did well or not. I alone knew what I was doing. (Habiba, Interview, 9/11/17)

Strong drive to prove their ability.

Some of the participants in this study reported facing isolation and humiliation because of their socio-economic status. This sense of feeling like "nobodies" caused them to work hard to succeed in school to prove to their critics wrong. At times, these critics even turned out to be well-to-do members of their extended families. In all cases, the participants set out to prove that they "can do it." For Efua, a female student from Ghana who was on track to graduate with a CGPA of 3.64/4.00 in Business Administration, and Jead, a Computer Science student from Kenya with a CGPA of 3.50/ 4.00, they felt they had proven to their peers that they could be very successful with their high academic achievement through their CGPA's. However, being able to use their work upon graduation to transform the economic conditions of their immediate families (in both cases, their mums) was what indeed determined their success and worth.

Efua reported that attendance at college earned her a lot of respect which hitherto she did not have amongst her family members. She felt she had proven her worth to her family because they now consulted her when making major family decisions because they believe she is now "somebody" important who can guide them. Efua reported that she felt this respect also extended to her mum, who was not initially regarded in the family because her children were not educated and were "nobodies." Efua explained:

I have been successful in my college education. I remember when my cousins started going to nursing school, and my siblings were all in the house hustling, it was like we did not have any purpose in the family because we were not in the position to contribute much. They would always say why is this particular family not moving on and improving in any way? My mum used to complain to us all the time about how our extended family used her

> for any kind of low-class work that needed taking care of by the extended family because they did not respect her. But now when I go home, I realize they respect me and always ask for my opinion about family issues and also advise about my younger cousins' education. They count on me, and now my mum receives the necessary respect that she deserves because of where I have gotten to. (Efua, 11/25/17)

Efuah is contributing to the need in her extended family for someone with her knowledge. She believed she had not only been able to transform herself through her college education to earn their respect but had also managed to get her extended family to accord that same respect to her mum. In recounting her story, Efuah reported this to be a significant milestone in her life. Similarly, Jead recounted:

> It is important to me to succeed because the way our extended family is it looks like my mum's children are the only ones who are not doing so well economically. To some extent it's like those who are well economically trying to look down upon us, and this hurts me so much. I don't want our whole life to be like that, people always looking down upon us and make us feel like we are nothing, we look so inferior, we are not worth anything, so all these things hurt. It's part of my drive to succeed and show them that we are worth something, and we are not just bare. (Jead, Interview, 9/23/17)

Both Efua and Jead suggested a feeling of having something to prove to their extended families. While this sense of wanting to prove their capabilities was explicitly stated by the two participants, many of the other students implied in various ways the need to "show" people, mostly members of their families and communities, that they were capable of excelling by getting the high

academic achievements. Across the data, this was a common aspiration amongst the participants regardless of their nationality or gender. Anonymous summed this up in his narrative and stated:

> Despite the fact that there's the lack of direction and all of that I have been able to make it and also be in the same class with people who have the inclination, people who have the means, people who have the coaching from their families. I am academically competent, and even the one helping them irrespective of the fact that I didn't get all that they got. I believe I am successful because I am on par with them. (Anonymous, Interview, 09/24/17)

To Fee, her education was a necessary "revenge" on those who doubted her abilities as a girl and felt her mum who hustled on her behalf was wasting already scarce resources on her. Additionally, Fee's account of her college success, though very personal, captured the various ways the participants viewed their college success against their hustle to attain their educational aspirations. She shared:

> I believe I have been successful with my college education because I have broken every barrier that was ever set for me. I went to high school. I am now in the process of getting a degree. There were people in my family who told my mum that 'you are wasting your money. Let this girl drop out of school and help you work.' Getting a scholarship to college was huge evidence of my potential. The fact that I have gotten this far is for me unbelievable. I didn't get pregnant along the way. I didn't drop out as people expected.
>
> Education opens doors. The fact that you have a degree is enough to give you some credibility. It gives you credibility and also affirmation. (Fee, Interview, 25/11/17)

In her account above, Fee gave a caption of her college success which challenged the status quo's assumptions and expectations of people like her not completing school, getting pregnant like her mother because she is a girl and not "needing" much education. A girl like that was perceived to end up marrying but also presented her own aspiration and showed her capability to achieve those aspirations through the many milestones she had attained for herself. In various ways, Fee's story represented some of the female participants in this study. Some participants also compensated for their low socioeconomic status with their academic capabilities to prove to their more affluent colleagues who sometimes teased and laughed at them in class that although they may be poor, they had the academic capital to make them relevant.

To Evans, Kanye and Larson (at that time vice president of the student body), all of whom had CGPAs above 3.70/4.00, it was imperative to find something to be relevant in to neutralize the playing field and to show their more affluent peers that they also had something to offer. Evans explained:

> They laugh at us in the morning and come to us in the night to help them with their academic work. For me, I didn't allow my background to affect me in my learning because you know that when it comes to Pre-calculus you are the one, they are going to call. When it comes to who has Iphone8, they are not going to call you. But when they mention who is the *shark* in Pre-calculus, they say Evans, Evans, Evans. They will be calling you. And that is what makes me proud even though I didn't own a Mac book. (Evans, Interview 11/11/17)

Collective optimism in the face of adversity.

Keeping a positive mindset in the face of adversity was a common characteristic across the participants' narratives. Many of the participants modeled this characteristic from seeing their

parents struggle to raise them and the positive reinforcement they received from their parents and significant adults in their families, schools, and communities to keep striving. This affirms Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory and suggests that these kinds of behaviors are cultivated by individuals to enhance their belief that if others have been able to make it, then they too can do it.

Additionally, participants used phrases like "having faith," "keeping hope alive," "trusting In God," "postponing immediate gratification" and "enduring adversity for future gains" to describe their attitude towards their adversities. Participants reported that although it was tough for them and their families who supported them, they collectively had hope that something positive will come out. This intense hope in the midst of adversity and many at times uncertainties also reaffirms the notion of hope which is defined as "the perceived ability to clearly conceptualize one's goals and derive paths to achieve them. Hope is a feeling of anticipation that some desire will be satisfied, or a promise will be fulfilled despite the delay, setbacks, or trouble" (Snyder, 2000 as cited by Strayhorn, 2019.pg. 117).

When describing her attitude each time she faced adversity, Sophia mentioned: "I have seen worse before, I saw my mum die in a different country, I lived there alone with no family members and have faced so many challenges in life that I always tell myself what this difficult assignment is?" Similarly, Evans mentioned:

> My hustle has made me strong. It has made me understand the realities of life. It made me understand that in every situation I can endure. It makes me feel proud, and it makes me feel like I can stand any obstacle that comes my way as long as I keep hope alive and continue to work hard.

For John, although it was tough to lose both parents and continuously rely on the generosity of people which was not always guaranteed, he learned to postpone instant gratification and said he was *very hopeful* that once he completed his education, he will be able to have a better life. He explained:

> My hustle has played an important role in helping me build patience because sometimes you have to play the waiting game. You have to delay gratification and hope and work that everything will work out. Hustling has shaped my view of things (John, interview, date).

Kanye believed hustling was very necessary because it had taught him to be empathetic towards people like him who struggle to meet their educational goals. He knows what they go through, and always seeks ways to help. He stated, "I faced a plagiarism case in my first year, I was very disappointed and confused, but it made me understand people like me and I am more empathetic and always look out for them to help them." Also, GMax mentioned that hustling had helped him develop fundamental traits like planning, prioritizing, and discipline. He explained:

> I prioritize a lot on my spending. Most of the time, my money is not enough, but it takes me through the semester. It takes out this extra burden of trying to look for or borrow and all those things. It helps you to identify what you don't need so you don't waste money on it. That has been the strategies I have used and planning. I know beforehand that I need to send an email to this person. I need to call my parents tonight. I need to do this. When it is that way, I don't run into problems like you forgot to do this and now you must follow some of the bureaucratic procedures to resolve all those things. Planning and prioritization have the strategies I have been using. Also, as I mentioned earlier, when I was in primary

school, I missed classes to take care of the family livestock. It took a lot of discipline to maintain a good academic standing in school still. (GMax, Interview, 9/23/17)

Eli saw his hustling as a good thing because it had helped him always to develop alternatives when he is not sure about any outcome. He elucidated the process of becoming a student leader:

> I am still thinking about other options. Even taking the leadership position, my vice and I, we thought about the possibility that we won't win, which meant there would be some time to spend. How do we use that time profitably? Then we thought about having a farm. But we didn't have the initial capital. But we were voted into power. That's when we started the school farm, the student's farm. I think about the alternatives like even when I see an obstacle before me, I know there will be an alternative to go around the obstacle. With my experience, I always believe there will be an alternative. Hustling has built me, and I don't get disappointment too much. Because you experience so many things, you can push on. When bad things happen, you say it's one of those stories because they all become stories at the end. So, hustling has made me a stronger person, I should say.
>
> (Eli, Interview,10/14/17)

Finally, some participants also mentioned that their hustle helped them to trust and have faith in God, who is the only one who can determine the future and the fate of people. Having faith and trust in God was described by some participants as what kept them going amid challenges. In her advice to people like her, Habiba explained, "you should have faith in God that you will succeed and work hard. It is only God who can determine your future, not a human being so avoid

negative people and trust in God." All the characteristics outlined above contributed to building the participants ability to take useful and significant action in the face of adversities to succeed.

Chapter Summary

In this study, I sought to understand the concept of *hustle* and how first-generation low-income students use it as a navigational capacity to attain educational success. Contrary to existing literature inductively using theories, concepts and analytical frameworks from the global north which mainly focuses on the barriers and deficits to their success, I chose to explore a more culturally nuanced framework which is more familiar to the populations of the students in this study who are from the global south. *Hustle* in this study was used in a more agentic and active manner to demonstrate the navigational capacity possessed and activated by these students throughout their educational experiences to achieve success.

In the chapter that follows, chapter six, I connect the findings to current literature and re-construct hustling as a range of navigational capacities and how it relates to the existing literature on FGLISs. I also discuss the implications of the field of higher education and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Six: Key Findings, Conclusion, and Implications

HYE WONHYE- That which does not burn

"I believe that my ability to endure difficult times helped me to succeed and overcome difficulties at the end." (Jead, Interview, 9/23/17)

Introduction

In this narrative inquiry study, I sought to understand *hustle* as a navigational capacity and its performance by 17 first-generation low-income undergraduates at an African university. Using thematic narrative analysis, I described the lived experiences of the participants' educational trajectory from as far back as they could recall, as they reflected upon in their senior year. While each student's educational path presented a distinct experience, their collective stories highlighted common themes that pointed to similar experiences with *hustle,* which I analyze together to attain the findings and conclusions of this study.

The ensuing sections in this final chapter will present an overview of three key findings emanating from this study and some conclusions I draw from the results. From there, I will suggest what I am calling the *capacity to hustle navigational framework* as a potential asset-based analytical framework for understanding the college experiences and success of first-generation low-income students from similar cultural and contextual backgrounds. I will then conclude the chapter with my final reflections on hustling, implications, and recommendations for policy, practice and future research and a final chapter summary indicating the limitations of the study and suggestions for future studies.

Summary of Findings

In recent decades, efforts to explain the college attainment of first-generation low-income students has been dominated by deficit narratives, which focus on their lack instead of the wealth of capital they have and bring to the academy. Culturally based approaches to explain their aspirations and successful college attainment have been sidelined and not actively pursued due to inadequate empirical and theoretical research backing these approaches. However, there have been recent calls by higher education and youth development scholars to take a more culturally relevant approach in analyzing and understanding the college experiences of this population of students. This approach considers their holistic life experiences, which shapes them to thrive and succeed and which highlights the unique strengths they have and bring to their college experience.

I address this call by empirically studying the operationalization of *hustle,* a culturally nuanced navigational capacity deployed by some first-generation low-income students at an African university in Ghana to attain college success. The study sought to understand how 17 undergraduates conceptualize, performed and associated their educational experiences with *hustle* culminating in their successful college careers.

The first finding from the study revealed that the participants' early experiences with education were considered positive, which grounded them to actively pursue high academic achievement despite the many barriers they faced. These positive experiences with education came from the active participation of their parents and were supplemented by significant adults in their lives in addition to the various ways they saw their parents and other members of their communities collectively committed to investing their time, and resources (both financial and non- financial) into their education. Further, the participants saw the benefits of people who had been educated

in their communities and believed they could strive for the same, although their immediate families had limited and sometimes no education. Through these experiences, participants gained a deep respect and value for their education, which encouraged them to continue pursuing education throughout their lives.

The second finding highlighted the multiple ways the participants conceptualized *hustle* and how they enacted it throughout their educational paths. Participants conceptualized *hustle* as a constant state of struggle to achieve they're set educational and life goals, mainly due to their low-income and first-generation identities. The findings also revealed that *hustle* took on various forms at numerous stages of the participants' educational experiences. Lack of adequate financial ability seemed to be the main struggle before the participants gaining admittance to college. Once the participants gained admission, sociocultural, socioemotional, and adjustment to the rigor of the liberal arts pedagogical style and curriculum became the participants' main struggle, especially during their first-year transition. This change in the form of struggle might be explained by the full financial aid status of all the participants which covered all costs of their attendance so that while they were in school, participants did not have to worry about paying for their college education—a significant struggle at the secondary and primary levels of their educations. This continues struggle beyond finances further confirms that financial ability is not the sole panacea to resolving the challenges FGLISs face while navigating the college.

The third finding focused on *hustling* and success offered a deeper understanding of the various meanings the participants associated with their college success beyond academic excellence. This finding revealed that success for the participants meant experiencing personal growth and being able to transform themselves, their families, and their communities. Success for some

participants also meant proving themselves as having the capability to achieve academic excellence.

Finally, the findings also indicated that participants developed a range of characteristics over time through their *hustle,* which helped them to persist in the face of adversities and when they encounter challenges in their educational pursuits. Additionally. The participants also learned essential values from their parents and significant adults around them like the importance of hard work, remaining committed to an objective and doing whatever it took to achieve it and persisting through difficulties which grounded them to navigate their adversities.

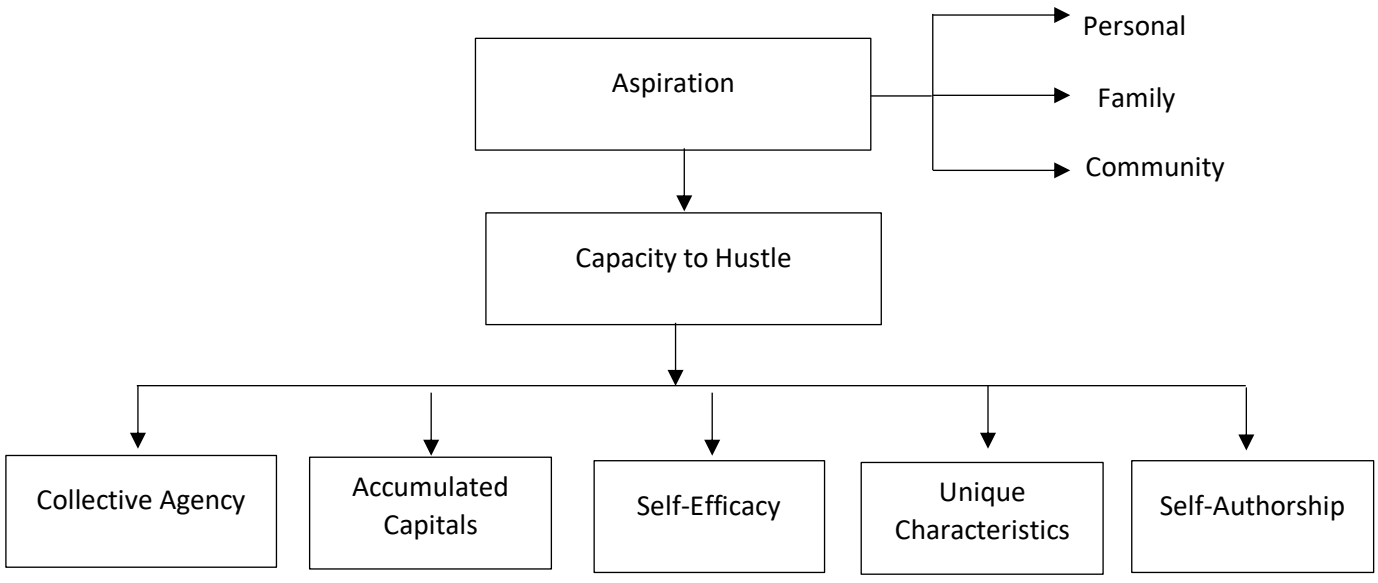
With these dispositions, participants devised several strategies to mitigate and make up for the areas they struggled with both in and out of the classroom through the process of "figuring things out." The process entailed staying up late to study, using the institutional resources available, sometimes going beyond to explore resources like videos and other academic materials on their own, seeking help from their faculty, university administrators and their friends when needed, embracing their low-income identities and compensating for it with a high intellectual capital when engaging with their peers from more affluent backgrounds.

Finally, participants postponed instant gratification through the process of what Honwana (2012) refer to as "waithood," which describes a prolonged period of uncertainty due to lack of resources to plan, knowing that their struggle will yield good results once they completed college. The findings above provided important insights into how the participants in this study experiences hustling through their conceptualization, performance, and connection of hustling to their success. In the next section, I present the key conclusions that can be drawn from the findings.

Key Conclusions
Examining Hustling

At the heart of this dissertation was the desire to understand *hustle* and its nexus with the college success of first-generation low-income students who are known to experience various forms of adversities and precarious conditions that threaten their ability to thrive and succeed in college. Throughout their stories, participants demonstrated multiple understandings of *hustle,* revealing a complex enactment of a confluence of competencies and accumulated sets of capitals performed at various crossroads to self-author their experiences (Baxter, 2014). In the figure below, I offer an analysis of some of the ways the participants in this study operationalized *hustle* and the competencies, capitals, and capacities the participants in this study demonstrated to contribute to our understanding of *hustle.*

Figure 6: Hustling as a range of Navigational Capital



Why a navigational capacity approach of understanding hustle?

Borrowing from Appadurai's (2001, 2005) concept of Navigational Capacity, a metaphoric understanding of youth's ability to negotiate their way through uncertainties to attain success and according to Swartz and Soudien (2015) the meandering nature of the journey from adversity to attainment which requires the ability to *navigate* in addition to the notion of *capacity* which suggests one's ability to learn and acquire multiple competencies , I propose *hustling* to be understood from the lens of a navigational capacity which also takes into consideration the context, culture, religion, ideas, and uniqueness of the youth. Navigational capacity thus focuses on the various capacities accrued by the youth and the context within which they operate. In the following sections, I identify some of these navigational capacities embedded in the stories shared by the participants in this study to highlight the multiple ways their hustle reflects these capacities.

Hustling as a Pathway to Meeting Multiple Aspirations

Hustling also created a pathway for the participants to attain multiple aspirations. "Aspiration is defined in most dictionaries as a strong aim, or ambition- a goal that may be hoped for, even in the face of evidence that suggests it may be beyond one's ability or expectation" (Strayhorn, 2016, p. 133). In this study, participants defined *hustle* as the multiple forms of struggle one endures in the face of limited and sometimes no resources to meet one's aspiration which may be personal, family oriented or towards their broader communities.

To operationalize this meaning of *hustling*, participants gave multiple examples from their lived experiences where they had to struggle to meet their daily basic needs as well as their future aspirations. Theses aspirations included their educational goals which they hoped would help them improve themselves and give them the skills they needed to do "real work" and not "hustle work"

- which is uncertain, informal and mostly menial. In many cases, hustling was undertaken to improve the socioeconomic conditions of their families, primarily by helping a struggling significant family member who is still hustling or be able to support the family more sustainably. Additionally, the participants had aspirations for their communities, which mostly included being an example to people like them who were also hustling.

While hustling has been theorized to be performed by youth living in adversity in the informal work setting and described as "a constant pragmatic search for alternative structures of opportunity outside formal education, employment, and service provision" (Theime, 2017), this study revealed that hustling can also be used as a means to transition from informal settings to a more formal environment - like the academic setting - to gain the needed skills and educational qualifications required to attain a more formal employment. Thus, the study's findings expand Theime's definition of *hustle*. Most importantly, this study has demonstrated that the participants performed *hustle* both in and out of the classroom to attain their educational aspiration.

This section has presented the multiple representations, forms, and dimensions of hustling and offered examples of how the participants in this study performed hustle individually and collectively to gain the needed competencies and capacities to navigate through their educational experiences to attain success. The section has also highlighted connections between the findings of this study and predominant theoretical frameworks used for the study of higher education. In the remaining chapters, I will highlight the implications of these conclusions from the findings of this study for theory and methodology and offer recommendations for future research focusing on the college attainment of first-generation low-income students and policy and practice for youth development.

Hustling as a Form of Collective Agency

At the heart of this study is an intentional scrutiny and consideration of the broad elements that work together to contribute to the best outcome of first-generation low-income students' college success beyond their individual efforts. In agreement with Swartz and Soudien (201), "Speaking only of youth risk-taking, or youthful resilience, ignores the structural nature of these [their] constraints and tends to place individual effort and individual remediation at the center of the intervention [that is used to work with them]" (p.95). I, however, believe that a broad understanding of the various pieces that connect and contribute to youth advancement holds more promise to understanding general youth development holistically, especially of youth who experience adversity in their development like the youth in this study.

I borrow from Mahmood's theorization of the "capacity for action" (2001, p. 203), a form of collective agency that youth perform together with the people in their families, schools, and communities. This collective agency reflects the youth's cultural, religious, socioeconomic, and geographical backgrounds. I particularly apply Alidou's 2005 definition of agency which purports that agency can be performed both individually and collectively about broader cultural norms, beliefs, and ideas of the context in which it is shown to achieve an intended goal or purpose. While the participants in this study were the leading performers of hustling, their performance in many ways was directly supported by their parents and other members of their communities.

This holistic definition of agency is especially useful in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. Collective agency can be likened to communal cultural behaviors where raising a child is a communal collective effort and not solely the responsibility of the parents of the child. Lloyd & Blanc (1996), for instance, noted that "extended family networks in sub-Saharan Africa enabled

children with an academic promise to move to households of 'patron' family members, who help them gain access to higher quality schools" (as cited in Buchmann & Hannum, 2001). Throughout their stories, participants reported living with a grandma, an uncle or aunt and sometimes total strangers like in the case of Sophia whose teachers took her in in Rwanda when she was orphaned until she completed her secondary education. At that point, she returned to her uncle in her home country, Kenya.

At the very foundation of the success stories shared throughout the participants' narratives were the various roles the significant adults in their success. These significant adults consist of their immediate and extended families, their schools, and communities. In many cases, the participants reported of the sacrifices their parents, a teacher or a member of their community made to pay for their fees, monitor their school work or simply pray for them to succeed Habiba's account of failing all her classes in her first-year and risking academic dismissal provides an adequate demonstration of collective agency. She reported:

> I felt like the whole university conspired to ensure that I was not sent home. My Academic Adviser helped me put a weekly plan in place to follow in doing all my assignments. She also put a team of faculty interns to help me when I needed help. The Dean of Students just gave me the space to cry in her office during the darkest and scariest moments in my academic experience and always reassured me that I can do it. Also, some good friends edited and read my work for me before I submitted them to make sure I got good grades. (Habiba, Interview, 09/11/17).

Habiba's case was not as unique, as many of the participants also shared similar stories. Other people came together to support them and ensure that they made significant progress towards their education. It can be concluded then that participants were able to attain their educational goals because they were supported by other significant members in their lives to work hard to achieve those goals individually. *Hustling* then can be said to be the integration of individual and collective efforts to achieve a set objective, in the case of the participants in this study, their educational goal.

While most of the participants in this study reported receiving support from other members of their families and communities, there were a few cases like that of Efua and Fee, where some members of the community discouraged this process of support because of the cultural beliefs of females not needing to progress in their education because they would eventually be given off to marriage. Even in this case, their parents fought such discouragement and single-handedly supported them to succeed. Again, in their instances, the degree of *hustling* heightened because both participants had to work even harder to prove to those members in their families that they were worth the educational support. The cases of Fee and Efua present the complex nature of collective agency in which the participants gathered from a vast pool of support adults who may not necessarily come from their immediate family members or community members.

Hustle as an accumulation of capital

The possession of various capital, social and cultural, have for a long time been used to determine the educational attainments of students (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Choy, 2001; Colman 1998; Kinsheloe, 2008; Lamont & Lareau 1988; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Putnan, 2000). Kincheloe (2008) defines cultural capital as the ways through which "members in the

dominant culture affords individuals ways of knowing, acting and being that can be 'cashed in' to get ahead in the lived world" (p. 110). This form of capital may be in the form of resources, information, and the acceptable and institutionalized codes and norms heavily determined by those in the upper and middle classes which they pass on to their children to put them ahead.

Likewise, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) define social capital as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 119). According to Bourdieu (1984), social capital consists of one's social connections and sociability and how he/she uses those connections to obtain benefits. He further argues that capital comes in three forms; social, cultural, and economic. Social, economic and cultural capitals have been demonstrated to influence access, transition and the overall educational experience and outcome of many students (Coleman, 1998)

In assessing the extent to which social and cultural capital accumulate benefits to the educational attainments of college students, many scholars have often argued that first-generation low-income students lack these forms of capital resulting in them lacking preparation for college, and lacking the cultural knowledge of how college works when they gain admittance, ultimately contributing to their low college attainment (Choy, 2001; Lareau, 2003; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Walpole, 2003, 2008).

All participants in this study lacked financial resources, which deprived them of attending well-resourced secondary schools and, consequently, many of them struggled in their first year. Also, many of their parents had few resources and sometimes no education. Thus, the students often did not understand how college works. Despite difficult odds, the students succeeded through their version of capital. The capital came from several sources such as their hustle and that of the

various members in their cultural communities, which are not traditionally recognized but yielded them the same benefits as their peers from more affluent backgrounds.

Participants reported working hard in school, taking their schoolwork seriously, attaching a high sense of respect to their education because of the dedication of their parents and cultivating a high aspiration for their education to do well to become 'somebody' in future. This form of capital confirms Yosso's (2005) assertion that disadvantaged students possess "aspirational capital" (p.77), which they cultivate and nurture. Yosso defines aspirational capital as "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p77-78). Although all the participants in this study experienced barriers, they all maintained their dream of gaining a higher education that had the possibility to transformed them and them a better future.

Across their narratives, participants reported seeking out professors and other peers for help each time they struggled with a subject. In Andile's case, she reported always finding out her peers who scored high on assignments and becoming friends with them to learn how they did it. In doing so, Andile sought information about the content and the ways others were attaining success and replicated it. Also, she reported "anytime my affluent peers hold conversations which I am not familiar with, or my professors used examples which I did not know about because I am not that exposed I went online to read about it, so I can also flow.'' Andile's example reveals how she cultivated the resources and network she lacked to help her to succeed.

In all their narratives, participants demonstrated multiple ways of accumulating the needed resources, connections, information, and networks from their families, schools, and communities which they applied to their educational experiences each time they were challenged to "figure out" what to do. This ability to figure things out contributed significantly to their college success

contrary to current literature, which portrays them as lacking the ability to figure out how college works and deficit about their college success.

All 17 participants in this study cultivated various forms of capital through their *hustle* and harnessing on their accumulated capitals to succeed. Most importantly, the participants also possessed unique yet typically unacknowledged forms of capital in academic literature, although they significantly contributed to the success of the participants. Examples included parents encouraging them, praying for them, uncles and other extended members of the family contributing towards their education, parents cultivating a high sense of hard work and respect for education which grounded the participant. Also, and significant adults nurturing high aspirations in them by suggesting to them what they could be and continuously affirming to them how intellectually competent they were which motivated them to keep striving for better.

Yosso (2005) refers to these forms of capital as "Community Cultural Wealth," which includes aspirational capital, social capital, navigational capital, familial capital, resistance capital, language capital and argues students like the participants in this study bring to the academe from their cultural communities and harness to attain success although not currently recognized by the higher education literature as valid forms of capital.

The various forms of collective agency demonstrated by the participants in this study and their significant adults aligns with current calls by scholars like Yosso (2005) to adopt more culturally nuanced and broader frameworks of analyzing and understanding the forms of capital disadvantaged and minority students cultivate from their cultural communities to achieve success in the academy [I explain Yosso's (2005) concept of Community Cultural Wealth extensively in chapter 2].

Hustling as a Source of Developing Self-efficacy

Participants in this study received support from multiple people at various stages in their educational experiences, which contributed to them building significant self-efficacy to handle the multiple challenges they faced in pursuit of their education. Bandura (1977), in explaining the concept of self-efficacy, mentioned four sources through which individuals attain information to help them to develop their self-efficacy: the ability for individuals to use their gained mastery of an initial failed attempt to encourage them that even the most difficult of tasks can be overcome with continued and sustained effort (performance accomplishments); seeing people they trust around them overcome very difficult conditions which they can also model, thus persuading themselves that if others have done it, they too can do it (vicarious experience); receiving affirmation of ability to handle difficult conditions using evidence of what they have overcome in the past through suggestions, commendations, and validation (verbal persuasion); and Emotional arousal which consists of "using physiological arousal in judging their anxiety and vulnerability to stress" (p.198).

There were several instances of all four of Bandura's elements being present in the participants' stories of *hustle*. For example, many of the participants gave examples of learning to gain perfection in their schoolwork through observing their peers who were kind and sometimes staying up late to keep trying to figure out an assignment or a task they did not understand. This example was evident in some of the participants using laptops for the first time in their first year of college. While this brought them great distress, the participants reported figuring out how to use it on their own in addition to observing their friends. Participants also said reassuring themselves with their prior successes and things they had overcome in the past to

motivate them that if they were able to overcome those hardships, then there was nothing they could not handle. Sophia stated:

> Whenever I meet a new obstacle, I always remind myself that I have gone through worse than this can do to me. I had lived in a country all alone, I have gone through trauma and everything, so really what is this assignment? There is nothing else, you know, I have been through the worse that anyone can be through. (Sophia, Interview, 10/21/17).

Through their hustle, participants also developed unique dispositions like endurance, ability to postpone gratification for the future, ability to work hard and immense optimism which sustained them to continue pushing through each time they encountered hardships. All these helped to develop their self-efficacy, which contributed to their success.

Finally, participants described an ability to contingency plan. Such planning is not present in Bandura's work but reflects a possible new direction for research in self-efficacy. Although participants demonstrated self-efficacy, they also were aware of the barriers in front of them and demonstrated agency by holding multiple plans in their hands at once. For example, GMax, for instance, reported taking on additional farming to save towards going to secondary school in case his parents' savings from their farm was not enough. He also gathered books and notes from his friends to study on the farm on days that he was unable to attend school because it was his turn to look after the family, cattle and other livestock.

Studies have indicated that increased self-efficacy leads to the process of building resilience amongst adolescence (Harvey & Delfabbro, 2004). Resilience is known as the ''ability to bounce back successfully despite growing up in adverse circumstances (Gordon, Padilla, Ford & Thoresen, 1994 as cited in Strayhorn, 2015). While they faced many adversities along with

their educational paths, particularly during their early education, all the participants "bounced back" each time they encountered challenges leading to their eventual success.

Hustling as a Catalyst to Self-authorship

Kegan (1994) first developed the concept of Self- Authorship in a theory he called *Evolution of Consciousness,* which explained the overlapping nature of an individual's cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development. According to Evans et al. (2010), Kegan's evolution of consciousness represented a "personal unfolding of ways of organizing experiences that are not just replaced as we grow but subsumed into more complex systems of mind" (p. 178). Thus, first-generation and low-income background students may subsume their new context with their prior socialization, experiences, and way of being before arriving at the academy as seen in this study where students reported of applying their ability to hustle and figure things out to the college environment.

Many ambiguities and tensions mark this process, in addition to moments of instability as their identities, are challenged both in and out of the classroom. According to Magolda (2001), it is these moments of dissonance, tension, and ambiguity that force individuals to find new ways of knowing and doing things leading to them self-authoring. Hustling forced the participants in this study to self-author at different points of their educational experiences by creating several moments of uncertainties and crossroads which required them to come up with a new way of handling the challenges they faced to succeed.

In this study, this state of crossroads and uncertainty peaked especially in the first year when student's intellectual capabilities which had earned them access to college on full aid were challenged when some of them faced several struggles with the liberal arts academic curriculum. This led them to moments of fear, self-doubt, feelings of not fitting in, and feeling like imposters.

The participants, however, moved past this stage and found new ways of knowing what they did not know and making decisions which helped them to overcome and ultimately succeed.

Although this process is standard for many college students, it may heighten particularly for students coming from the backgrounds of like those participants in this study. Such students may not be as exposed to academic environments, particularly in a liberal arts college environment which is entirely novel on the African continent. This non-inclusive nature of the experiences of first-generation low-income students is further reiterated by Jahangir, Williams, and Pete (2011) who contend that the lived experiences of first-generation and low-income students are "unlikely to be reflected in the curriculum" (p.57). Participants in this study reported similar experiences.

Consequently, the absences of their experiences in the academic environment force them to feel like strangers and isolated from the academy. This feeling of marginalization forces first-generation and low-income students to encounter moments of dissonance leading them to self-author their own identities and determine how they relate to others in the academic community (Abes & Jones, 2004; Magolda, 2001). This happened more regularly for the participants in this study because they did not have experience with how to use a laptop, reference academic papers, or make presentations in class. Many of their affluent peers came to the university with these skills. Martin explained in his narrative, stating:

> I struggled with presentations. In my secondary school, we never had to make presentations, I did not even know how to use the computer, but I watched by other colleagues who went to international schools do it so well, they ask questions in class confidently because they speak English so well. This was not the case for me; I was always afraid I will be called in class and did not know how to present. I quickly had to go online

and learn because every class demanded that we made a presentation. (Martin, Interview, 10/15/17).

At the core of self- authorship is a person's ability to encounter moments of dissonance with their core values and beliefs that pushes them to what Baxter Magolda (2001) terms a *crossroad*, forcing the individual to develop their own set of values which is in harmony with their interactions with others [I explain self-authorship in detail in chapter 2]. *Hustling* presented the participants in this study with multiple opportunities to problem-solve on their own to survive their precarious conditions.

Take the example of Larson's early school days where he had to walk several kilometers to a bus stop, then beg fellow passengers to sit on their laps because he could not afford the bus fare. He would then scramble with everybody else to get into the packed *trotro*, [the local transportation]. Larson recounted an experience where strangers would often make judgmental comments about his mother, calling her irresponsible for permitting her child to hustle his way into a *trotro* which sometimes takes a lot of physical scrambling to board. "It makes you feel very hurt," Larson recalled, as he knew his family had little choice because of their socioeconomic conditions which made it impossible for him to afford his seat on the *trotro.* As a result, he negotiated daily with strangers on the *trotro* to sit on their laps. As he got older, this negotiation got more humiliating, and the Larson eventually worked out a deal with a *trotro* driver. In exchange for a ride to school, he tutored the driver's child every weekend.

In Larson's narrative, *hustling* was in part the act of struggling his way into the trotro every day but also his capacity to work out an informal agreement with the driver that allowed him a means to get to school. Larson's hustle thus pushed him not just to figure out a more sustainable

plan to get to school daily, but also an arrangement that was acceptable to both the driver and other passengers because he found a way to earn his seat on the trotro just like everyone else.

According to Magolda (2001), it is the individual's ability to resolve the conflict which arises at the crossroads with their own set of workable plans, beliefs, values and actions that causes them to become the author of their own life experiences without being told what to do or relying on others to do the figuring out for you. Throughout their narratives, the participants in this study experienced several crossroads in various forms from financial constraints to their identities to sometimes a feeling of self-doubt of their abilities and sense of belonging.

The participants, however, also reported hustling their way through their education by devising several strategies from taking on menial jobs to make money to pay their way through school or working extra hours throughout the night to understand and make up for their academic work or even accepting their low-income status in a seemingly affluent social environment which intentionally or unintentionally highlighted their lack of material possessions.

Therefore, *hustling* pushed the participants into situations where they encountered several crossroads at various stages of their academic and socioemotional experiences, which enhanced their ability to self-author. Their actions are consistent with the literature on first-generation and low-income students' propensity to self-author faster than their peers from more structured and almost laid out experiences but offer a unique set of examples that contribute to the higher education literature.

Final Thoughts Implications and Limitations

While there has been an abundance of studies highlighting the barriers that hinder the college attainment of first-generation and low-income students to understand their unique conditions and challenges, it is equally important also to know how they have experienced

schooling before college and the significant factors that have motivated them and contributed to their success. A current gap in higher education literature relates to studies that can offer a deeper understanding of some of the the students' strengths and capabilities that they bring to the academy which could foster their success (Gorski, 2011; Harper, 2010; Kim &Hargrove, 2013; Rendon, 1994; Yosso, 2005).

A strengths-based approach to researching first-generation and low-income students' college success offers the opportunity to understand how they overcome significant barriers to succeed despite their many disadvantages (Harper, 2010). Additionally, a strengths-based approach provides insights into institutional actions which support and facilitate them by shaping our understanding of how students engage with these positive institutional functions, systems, people, processes, and policies (Rendon, 1994).

Furthermore, a strength-based approach could deepen our understanding of the unique assets possessed by first-generation and low-income students such as their persistence, their ability to positively self-author and their use of skills acquired from their life experiences before arriving at college to gain mastery of the educational system to facilitate their success. The strengths-based approach to researching first-generation and low-income college success offers an opportunity to understand the experiences of those who are overcoming the barriers and constraints they face to succeed and how they are navigating the academic environment to attain the best outcome.

The capacity for *hustling* among students coming from first-generation and low-income backgrounds is an example of a strength-based approach and an important navigational capacity that reflects their ability to develop and use strategies familiar to them to maneuver the uncertainties, precarities, and challenging conditions in attaining their educational aspirations. *Hustling* provides a more holistic culturally and contextually relevant framework of understanding

youth experiences, recognizing that a deeper understanding of these cultural and contextual differences and nuances and validating them allows for a more diverse way of accessing student success without applying a broad stroke for everyone.

Furthermore, the capacity to hustle is a more comprehensive assessment of students' capacity to navigate college because it encompasses several concepts like grit, resilience, hardiness, endurance, hope, and persistence which are all measures used to ascertain students' ability to complete college. It helps to explain the complex nature of human engagement and interactions, which is most likely to be a combination of multiple and collective factors that contribute to the success of individuals.

Concerning methodology, this study provided a youth-centered research methodology that has great potential for use in understanding the experiences of students from their perspectives. The narrative inquiry approach created a platform for participants in this study to tell their own stories. Instead of treating youth as objects or subjects, this approach allowed them to be agents in directing their narratives. Additionally, the narrative inquiry approach allowed me as a researcher to engage in an inductive process of making sense of the participants' stories, through which the concepts of *hustling* surfaced. This approach is often not used in education research in the context of youth from the Global South. I argue that this methodology draws on the rich storytelling tradition in sub-Saharan Africa and should be harnessed more in Global South research.

Similarly, much of the current discussion on first-generation low-income students portray students as passive recipients and beneficiaries of youth development policies instead of active participants in their development. This study has shown that youth take an active role in their development by actively acquiring resources and developing useful networks which they tap into for their development. Furthermore, this study has indicated that youth possess great aspirations

for a better life, and proactively seek what it takes to attain their goals. This yearning for a better life is captured in Suzy's comment about what her academic success meant to her:

> My academic success means a lot to me because I want to be different. In the family, no one has a career. People just do small things to make ends meet. But I want to be the one that has a career and be able to stand up and motivate my family. If I should say; they are hopeless. I want to be the one that everyone is looking up to. That for me will be what success means to me. I also want to be independent; throughout my life, I have depended on people. I want to be able to stand on my own feet and help others, so that motivates me to work hard and hustle to make it. (Suzy. Interview, 10/21/17)

Suzy, like many of the participants in this study, nurtured personal and communal aspirations to improve their lives and that of their families and communities and showed significant commitments and dedication through their multiple forms of hustle to attain those aspirations. I argue that in order for policies to better reflect the incredible diversity of youth, and the different conditions in which they live, researchers and practitioners need to do a better job of telling multiple stories and not just the "single story" which has the danger of presenting only one side of the narrative (Adichie, 2009). Policymakers need to let youth propose their solutions to educational trajectories.

To this end, the conclusion of this dissertation draws upon the final words of the students. In this last section, the participants in this study offer advice and recommendations to other first-generation and low-income students like them on how to also be successful and to institutions and people who work with people like them on how best they can support them. Below are their final words that both summarize all of the findings below related to hustle and chart a way forward for both research and practice, based on the stories and advice of those who have hustled to succeed.

The advice below is written to both other students who will find themselves hustling and to institutions that will be working with these students.

Table 2 : Advice from Participants

"Advice to People Like Us"
For people like me, the essential thing they should be paying attention to is to persist and not to give up. Situations might be difficult, but you need to push yourself out of it. You must keep pushing and not just take no for an answer.
Take ownership of your life, your choices, and your experiences will all contribute to your success, so don't take anything for granted; it always comes together.
Sometimes you have to play the waiting game. You must delay gratification and hope and work that everything will work out. Have an aspiration even if you don't know how to attain it and continue working and believing and hoping that things will turn out okay. Once there is no hope, or once you feel that nothing will work, then I think that's where the problem starts. If you don't believe that things will turn around, you will have very little motivation to continue. For students like me, we tend to reflect more, or we tend to make a lot of consideration when it comes to making decisions. Sometimes you will find yourself in situations where you don't have the answer so just have to make the best decision possible and just take responsibility for it. I think taking responsibility for your situation and yourself, for me I think that's one thing that stands out that has shaped me. Taking responsibility is very important. For instance, there is another student may be in a better position the socio-economic background, and they may be more likely to blame someone else may be their parents or their friend for something not going the way they want it to go. The situation I am in, my experiences I want to make decisions and I want to own them

and take responsibilities for them because I wouldn't want someone to decide for me, and later, I have to take responsibilities for it. I want to decide if it goes well, great; if it doesn't, that's my problem, and I deal with it. And, to really like appreciate people from different backgrounds and different people irrespective of how different they are.
What has worked for me is the ability to seek help. I believe I am not the first to go through any situation. So, I learn from their experiences and knowledge. Also, success always comes through hard work. It's always good to put in your best effort. Hustling is all about putting in the efforts to achieve something. Sometimes you must forgo your sleep or a movie that you could have watched to study your textbook or research online. So, you must sacrifice pleasure to make it. I think that is what I have done to succeed.
What I will say to students like me is that believe in yourself. It's only you who can take yourself as far as you want. Believe in yourself, don't listen, like I tell people don't listen to the negative things others say about you. You can assess and accept the positive criticisms, but it all boils down to you believing in yourself. All the time I didn't do well academically was because I doubted myself, my ability to do well. Also, accept your background and work hard to change it because you don't get to choose your family. Ask for help, and learn to talk to people. You will be surprised that there are a lot of people going through the same thing.
I will say, identify what you are good at and use it to your advantage. You know endurance, you know to be patient, you know how to learn, you know how to fight. All of this from your hustle before you got to college, use it to your advantage.

Don’t waste your time complaining and making excuses, associate with friends who can challenge and help you and whatever you do seek perfection. Do it to the best of our ability, so you are known for that thing.
The only difference between the rich and the poor or those who are making it and those who are not making it is the information. So, seek the information you need and don’t use your family background as an excuse. Worry your lecturers for the information and use the resources available at the school and if it’s not there, use other means to find it, like videos and YouTube. You have no excuse after hustling to college not to make it.
Know that you are different. Know the responsibility you carry and don’t compare yourself to other people from well to do backgrounds. You are not like any other college student; in your case, you are developing your life and the lives of the other people behind you and also build their future, so that makes all different. So, you are different from someone who is here and is just focusing on building only their future. Just realizing that will make you more successful.
It’s all about being aware of your weakness and seeking help to make up for it.
Have a purpose and work towards it. Be very tactful, plan, prioritize, and execute.
You have to put in the hard work; there is no way around it.
Have multiple alternatives and don’t depend on only on one plan.
I read something that it is not a mistake to be born into a low-income family, but it a mistake for you to remain poor. What I got from that saying is that we do not choose our families, we didn’t choose our circumstances. We were born into it but there is always an opportunity for us to change our status, to change our lives with the right people around you and the resources and then the determination on your part, you can actually make it.

Have an aspiration or dream and be determined to persist no matter what to achieve it. Find support and a place to offload because it can be overwhelming. Seek help and know that people generally are willing to help.
"Advice to Institutional and People who Work with u.s."
Look out for people like us and don't mix us up with everyone else because our experiences are different
Be open and don't judge them. Have high expectation for them and support them to reach that expectation.
To faculty, be mindful of the various experiences in your class and be more inclusive with examples when teaching
To educators who work with people like me, they should not make assumptions and think "this is common sense" because common sense might not be familiar to all of us because of our backgrounds. The should ask questions and clarify and not make assumptions.
To people working with students like me, I will say they should get to know us, our experiences, and our stories so they can empathize and understand what kind of support we need. They should not wait for us to come to them for support but must reach out to see what is going on with us because they are like our parents to guide us. We don't get academic guidance from our parents.
They should be patient with us and give us time to know because the environment is very different from what we are used to.

Students with backgrounds like mine are adaptable. So whatever challenges you might put them in they quickly adapt in. They find a solution to it. People in authority may not trust their capabilities to do that because they do not understand them and their experiences.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

While the capacity to *hustle* holds great promise, this is the first time it has been operationalized empirically in the academic setting. There is a need for more research to further strengthen the development of this framework with more practical applications in the academic environment. Additionally, there is a need to use this framework to understand similar populations of students in another context with greater diversity in the population of students. It would also be intriguing to operationalize the capacity to *hustle* with students from more economically resourced and second and third generation students to understand if the elements proposed in the framework would still hold or vary.

Finally, I contend that while many research projects challenge higher education institutions to develop policies and systems that are more inclusive of the experiences of the diverse student population they admit, it remains a challenge when it comes to how to undertake this effectively without further segregating first-generation low-income students in ways that draw negative attention to them. There needs to be more research on how higher education institutions can effectively do this, especially in contexts in sub-Saharan Africa where the concept of being on scholarship connotes poverty, marginality, 'lack' and deficit.

In this dissertation, I have presented the data that emerged from the narrative study on *hustle* and the conclusions I drew from the findings. I proposed a framework for assessing the navigational capacity of first-generation low-income students I call the capacity to hustle framework which I believe hold a lot of promise for understanding the multiple factors which contribute to the success of first-generation low-income students. I then presented the

implications of my findings and conclusions to researching the broader field of higher education, the benefits of using youth-centered narratives when researching in sub-Saharan Africa where storytelling is valued and familiar and presented some recommendations the participants gave to their peers like them seeking to attain educational success and institutions working with students like them. Through this work, I sought to operationalize hustle and establish it as a legitimate analytical frame for understanding how low income and first-generation students navigate higher education. The study was conducted in a single African university, but findings may be relevant for other institutions across Africa and beyond. If there are barriers to education, there will be a need for students to hustle. The stories of my participants provided an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and what it means to students.

In conclusion, it is essential to note that although some literature highlights some of the impacts of government policies on college access for FGLISs in this region and efforts initiated to improve access, there is a significant shortage of literature covering the experiences of FGLISs once they gain access. Because of the minimal opportunities, FGLISs have to access, I seek to understand the experiences of those who gain access to ensure that their admittance results into college attainment, but most importantly know how they navigate the academy to succeed. Hence, my interest to explore the phenomenon which seems to be contributing to the success of FGLISs from this region from their stories and personal narratives. Below I offer my initial conceptualization of *hustle* and locate it within the CCW model and the Self - Authorship theory.

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